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BRIDE of the TOMAHAWK PACK
A Cheyenne Novelet by PRATT MESSER

★

INDIAN STORIES

MY LIFE WITH SITTING BULL
Article by WALTER J. WINTERS

WINTER 1959

ADVENTURES OF THE FIRST AMERICANS

INDIAN Stories

WINTER
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FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES
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BRIDE of the TOMAHAWK PACK

A Novelet of Cheyenne Fury
by PRATT MESSER

Down the Sioux war-trails rode the adopted Paleface—

MY LIFE WITH SITTING BULL

by WALTER J. WINTERS

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INDIAN Stories

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A Roaring Redskin Novel

BRIDE OF THE TOMAHAWK PACK . . . . . ***Pratt Messer*** **62**

Deadly as the speeding arrow; sly as a moccasined stalker, the siren Cheyenne squaw planted her charms and her guile among the blue-coated Legions of Fort Dodge . . . then touched off the fuse that dynamited Little Bear's painted braves into a savage war of attrition.

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This is the most amazing life adventure story that has ever appeared in the pages of a magazine. Walter J. Winters once rode naked into battle with paint-daubed Sioux legions as the adopted son and personal bodyguard of that great chieftain, Sitting Bull.

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"Do what you will," Rain-in-the-Face shouted at Sitting Bull and myself as the blood trickled down his swinging legs. "No torture can wring a moan from my lips."

My Life With Sitting Bull

By WALTER J. WINTERS

This is the most amazing true life adventure story that has ever appeared in the pages of a magazine. Walter J. Winters once rode, naked, into battle with Sitting Bull's paint-daubed Sioux legions. Here are his adventures as told a few years ago to William Robertson.

I WAS born in Toronto, on March 17, 1858.

At the age of thirteen, I was a husky lad, tall, big-boned, and looked seventeen.

I always had a craving to get out into the world, and make my own fortune. In fact, I was forever pestering my mother to let me go, but she steadfastly refused.

Finally, however, I persuaded her to allow me to have my own way, and she relented.

Having parted with the family, I set out for Winnipeg, and upon reaching that city, I put up at a Mrs. McMurtie's boarding house. It was there that I first made the acquaintance of Charles (Dad) Fowler, an old Indian fighter and buffalo hunter, from the United States.

A great friendship sprang up between us. He told me he was going to make a trip to the South American gold fields, and invited me to go with him. And, as there was every prospect of exciting adventure in such a journey, I eagerly accepted.

It was his idea to build a boat and float down the Mississippi to New Orleans, hunting and trapping on the way, to get enough furs to pay for the last lap of the journey to Venezuela.

Having made our preparations, we set out for the headwaters of the Missouri, whence we expected to drift into the big river.

The boat was built according to Dad's plan, and we started down the stream, launched on an adventure that has no parallel in history.

In due time we reached a point midway between Great Falls and Benton, where we stopped to trap beaver, in a little creek.

We remained there a week, then embarked and paddled downstream.

I was gazing lazily into the water, when I felt the boat slacken speed as my partner dragged his paddle.

"S-s-s-st," he hissed, and I glanced up.

To our left, across the river, the whole valley was alive with Indians and ponies, while hundreds of teepees dotted the land.

A few yards from shore a half dozen bull-boats, each containing two or three braves, danced and spun on the water like great, hairy spiders.

A shout from shore. The redskins in the bull-boats saw us, and with a mastery of the strange tub-like crafts (made of bent staves, over which buffalo skins had been stretched) they started in our direction with remarkable speed, when one considers the awkwardness of the devices they were piloting.

"By God" Dad cried, and it was seldom he used that oath, "it was just what I was afeared of. Them devils is Sioux."

"Well, if we're in for it, we're in for it," I answered; "there's no need to try to run away from them."

And then I turned and glanced at the old man. His face was like chalk. But, otherwise, he appeared quite calm.

"I ain't worryin' on my part much," he said, "but it is fer you, Walter. Don't, under any circumstances, let 'em know that I understand and speak the language. I'm a marked man with a couple of their bands.

"If they recognize me, they're likely as not to do the same dirty work with you they've got saved up for me."

Instinctively I grabbed my rifle and cocked it.

"Don't shoot, for the love of God," the old man cautioned, in a hoarse whisper.

"I won't," I answered with a hysterical laugh. "Paddle on, we might just as well go over and try to make friends with them."

At that very moment, fortune favored me with an opportunity to let off steam.

II

"HONK, honk," came the call of a wild goose, as it glided over the trees, and started to dip toward the river.

Scarcely realizing what I was doing, I pulled my gun and fired.

The bullet went true to its mark, and the big bird splashed in the water not a hundred feet from the nearest bull-boat. A second later, two more geese arose from the river bank and headed toward the teepee-dotted valley on the other side.

"Bang!" again I fired, but missed. Another goose winged lazily by, for the birds were unbelievably tame, and again I winged one, which fluttered down on the opposite bank, in the very midst of a group of redskins, who had been attracted by the shots.

"Tall shootin', son," the old man muttered. "I don't know how you did it, but if I'd had my way about it, them bullets, all three, would have plugged some of them dirty Sioux."

The bull-boats, which were being augmented by others from the shore, began to take on a fan shape. We saw at once that the plan was to encircle us, but we paid no heed to it. Instead, I put my rifle back in the boat, and went to work with my oar. In a few more strokes we had come within reach of the first goose I had winged, and dragged it into the boat.

"We'll give it to the chief," Fowler murmured under his breath, and a moment more he turned to one of the Indians, whose bull-boat by this time had come almost alongside us, and exclaimed, "How! How!" but, try as he would, there was not a friendly inflection in his voice.

The Indian was one of the handsomest specimens I had ever seen. He must have been six feet two tall, and his muscles stood out on his broad chest and arms like a mass of glittering brown cables.

He wore a headdress of vari-colored feathers, and his face was streaked with yellow and blue.

The aborigine grunted some kind of a reply, threw up his hand in a token of friendship, and pointed toward the bank, indicating that we should proceed in that direction.

By this time a number of other boatmen had closed in on our rear, and we

were herded toward the shore, which was now lined with several hundred Indians, men, women and children, all of whom were evidently watching the proceedings with the liveliest interest.

When at last the prow of our little craft grated on the gravelly bottom, three or four youthful Indians dashed into the water, seized the sides of the boat, and dragged it on shore.

My knowledge of Indians was very limited—much more so than it would otherwise have been, had not my experienced companion been a man of so few words. All that I did know about them, however, I had gathered from him.

It required considerable courage for me to step out of the boat with a show of indifference.

But I knew it would be a frightful mistake to do otherwise, and seizing the goose I had salvaged from the water I sprang ashore as if I were greeting old-time friends.

Old Dad was only a step behind, and he whispered:

"Give the bird to the chief."

The cautioning was unnecessary, however, as I had no other thought in mind.

Braves and squaws crowded about us, staring, laughing, grimacing as though we were two strange creatures that had dropped down from another planet.

A dozen or more dogs of divers lineage darted forward, and began sniffing around our boots, winding up with a grand free-for-all fight.

While the dog fight was being settled, a masterly figure brushed aside the staring savages, and stood gazing at us with eyes that seemed to bore into my very being, like a pair of rapidly revolving gimlets.

The upper portion of the Indian's face was painted black. The lower part was brilliant with madder, which glistened in the last rays of the dying sun.

The man was about six feet in height, straight as the proverbial ramrod, and rather inclined to heaviness. His jet hair hung platted on either side of his face, and around his shoulders was flung a somewhat faded blanket of carmine and green.

His legs were inclined to be stocky, and were obviously bowed, the only shortcoming in his really splendid appearance.

There was nothing in the man's costume to suggest to one of my experience that this was the chief. But those flashing, eloquent eyes, which burned like coals in their lurid setting, spoke a language all must understand:

"I command, and my word is law."

Flinching under the iron gaze of the Chief, and scarcely knowing what I was doing, I bowed, and handed him the goose.

How ludicrous it must have seemed! But there was never a trace of humor on those irresistible features, as his huge hand accepted my poor gift, and passed it to a youth of perhaps fifteen who stood beside him.

Then he spoke in Sioux. I noticed Fowler shake his head, falsely indicating that he did not understand, and I imitated his gesture.

Then the Chief laid his hand on my shoulder, and I felt instinctively that his attitude was one of friendship.

"I see you shoot, Wamble Ishta (Eagle-Eye)." he said in broken English. "Come with me."

And uttering a cryptic command to his braves, who rapidly fell back, and opened up a path through the crowd that huddled about us, he led the way to the village.

Fowler and I both carried our rifles with the muzzles pointed to the ground, and I was somewhat astonished that we were not disarmed.

The Chief paid no attention to our weapons, but walked ahead, with a panther-like tread that betokened his physical strength and agility. It would have been an act of madness on our part, however, to have attempted resistance.

A hundred or more braves trailed in the rear, and the mere shift of the position of our rifles would have been the signal for a volley from behind.

AT last we arrived at a larger teepee that stood out some little distance from the others. A couple of squaws were cooking meat in a huge kettle, not far from the flap of a wigwam.

They looked up for only a moment when we passed, grunted, chattered a few words in Sioux, and resumed their task just as if nothing unusual had happened.

The Chief pointed to the entrance of the teepee, and we stepped in. The floor was covered with hides of various kinds,

buffalo, deer and elk.

A few blankets hung from the tent poles, and the only other decorations were a huge cherry-wood pipe, fluttering with feathers, somewhat similar to those now common in curio stores, but of beadwork, and two or three bows, and well-fitted quivers.

Fowler and I stood our weapons against the tent wall and seated ourselves on a panther skin.

The Chief had not uttered a word since we had left the river bank.

"Settin' Bull," old Dad murmured, as our captor turned his back to drop the flap of the teepee.

A thrill shot through me. At last I was in the presence of the hero of whom I had heard only a few nights before as I lay under the starry sky, drinking in Fowler's homely description of the Sioux's gallant exploits.

The Indian turned. His sharp ear had overheard the whisper of my companion. There was a trace of a smile upon his immobile countenance.

"You know me," he said in English. "Have I seen you before?"

There was not a flicker in the blue eyes of the old man as he replied truthfully to the contrary, but I knew his heart must be beating faster, for fear Sitting Bull might penetrate the secret of his former experience with the Sioux.

"If I have never seen you, how you know me?" the Chief queried.

"I guessed," was Fowler's reply.

The Chief shook his head as a sign that he either did not understand, or believe him.

"I do not know the Sioux," Fowler went on, swimming out of the deep water into which he seemed to have slipped, "but I have heard much of them. My father, for many years, lived in Wyoming. Oftentimes he told me of his friend, Jumping Buffalo."

At the mention of his father's name, Sitting Bull betokened surprise, but he said nothing.

"Jumping Buffalo was a brave man, a very brave man," Dad went on, dropping, in the stress of a light situation, his usual careless mode of speech. "My father told me this many times. He told me how Jumping Buffalo died, fighting hand to hand with a Crow warrior, but killing his enemy with his knife as he dropped from his saddle.

"So many times I heard that story, so many times I heard him say, 'Jumping Buffalo has a brave son, Hunkeshnee (meaning "Slowpoke," a nickname given Sitting Bull during his boyhood, because he was not a good runner, and was almost always on horseback) who will some time be a great Chief of the Unkpappas."

"Hunkeshnee is now Settin' Bull, I know, and Settin' Bull looks like the Jumping Buffalo my father knew."

From some source Fowler had learned about Sitting Bull's early life, and of his father, Jumping Buffalo. But, of course, it had not come from the source he pretended.

"The white man lies," Sitting Bull said, with that sarcastic curl of the lip for which he was noted, "but he tells a kind lie this time.

"The white man is born with a lie on his lips. He dies with a lie on his lips. He goes to hell with a lie on his lips. Then he wonders why the Indian cannot trust him."

The Chief's words bit like acid. They came from a heart embittered by years of dealing with unprincipled whites, the riff-raff of the plains, who were, indeed, not samples of our race at all, but whom Sitting Bull took as representative of the Caucasians generally.

The situation was not a comfortable one for us. Sitting Bull sat silent for a few minutes and I could not help wondering how he had detected the falsehood in Old Dad's words.

III

LATER I was to learn that those gimlet-like eyes had the peculiar faculty of boring their way into the very soul of those he conversed with and reading the innermost thoughts of the speaker as though they stood out in bas-relief on his forehead.

Experience had been a splendid teacher with him. He had seen liars so often that they were visible to him at a great distance.

There was a slight scratching at the wigwam flap. A guttural exclamation came

from the Chief.

In stepped three fine specimens of the Indian race, favorite warriors of Sitting Bull.

The newcomers seated themselves opposite us on the right of the Chief, eyeing us keenly, as Sitting Bull proceeded to ply us with questions as to who we were, whence we came, and what we were doing on the upper Missouri.

Dad, who did the talking for us, explained as best he could that we had come in search of furs, and with a view to proceeding on down the river to the Father of Waters, and thence to a great city where the Mississippi tumbled into the warm waters of the Gulf.

When the old man had finished his recital, the Chief produced a pipe, and kinnkinick mullen, and other leaves which passed for tobacco.

As a gesture from him, one of his favorites disappeared from the wigwam, returning a moment later with a smoking fagot from which the pipe was lighted.

He then held the ember out, signing for us to smoke if we chose.

Fowler shook his head, but I gladly accepted an opportunity to do something, to hide my nervousness, and produced a little stone pipe, which had been presented to me by an aged Indian in Toronto.

I had scarcely lighted it, and taken a few drags from the wooden stem, when I noticed a curious look on Sitting Bull's face.

He fired a couple of trivial questions at me, apparently paying no heed to my answers, but his gimlet eyes were drilling their way through me.

I could not understand his strange expression until he motioned for me to let him see my pipe.

He took one look at the crude stone bowl, and his painted face clouded until it seemed to my imaginative mind the crimson portion of his visage had turned black, too.

Holding it so his favorites could see it closely, he fixed those piercing orbs upon me again, and muttered:

"Ojibway (Chippewa) pipe, You come from Ojibway country?"

And his hand shot out like a lance toward the east.

Fowler hastened to tell how the gift had come into my possession.

The explanation seemed to satisfy Sitting Bull for a moment, but so fierce was his hatred for the Chippewas, ancient enemies of the Dacotahs, that he could not return the pipe to me.

Instead he seized a hatchet which lay beside the favorite nearest him, and bringing it down with a terrific blow, broke the stone bowl into bits.

The goose flesh quivered along my spine, and I believe my hair stood up like a porcupine's quills as I witnessed the intense fury of Sitting Bull.

The muscles stood out like whipcords on his neck, and fire blazed from those deep brown eyes, as he poured forth invectives against the Chippewas.

His harangue lasted perhaps two minutes. Then, apparently relieved, he held his head to one side in a whimsical way, and the ghost of a smile strayed over his painted features.

Reaching for a crude box that lay near him, he fumbled inside, and drew forth a pipe. Carved on the front was a bull buffalo, sitting on his haunches—a "sitting bull"—which he extended to me.

"Wamble Ishta," he said, "smoke the pipe of a man, not a dog."

I could have thrown my youthful arms about the old savage, so great was my relief at the cooling of his anger.

Thereafter the Chief's attitude changed completely.

He was as jovial as one of his stolid nature could be, and seemed bent on entertaining us as well as possible.

The flap of the lodge was thrown back, and the light from the camp-fire flared into the teepee, while squaws brought in earthenware bowls, filled with a stew of venison and stringy bear meat.

Fowler and I were ravenous and ate greedily, using our pocket knives in the absence of cutlery.

Not yet had I, at least, become accustomed to the primitive art of handling our viands with our fingers, as our savage host did.

The meal finished, Fowler arose and thanked Sitting Bull for his hospitality.

"We must go now," he said. "It is growing late. We will have to pitch camp before dark."

A smile spread over the painted features

of the Chieftain.

"No," he said, "you must not go yet."

And again a half dozen sentences crackled from his lips like machine-gun fire, and one of the favorites departed, returning a few moments later with a bulky bundle of furs, and some beaded moccasins.

"The white men have furs," he said, "but the Sioux have had much luck, too. We will give them plenty of furs, and our squaws have made fine moccasins."

He sorted the furs and moccasins in two heaps.

"These," he said, pointing to one of the heaps, and with a touch of humor, "are for you, old-man-with-the-Jumping-Buffalo-lie-on-his-lips."

Then turning to me, he said:

"Wamble Ishta, take them. Last night I was sick at heart. From traders who came up the Missouri last summer, I secured many rifles.

"My warriors, they shoot much, but have been trained to use the bow and arrow. The white man's weapon is new to them. The bullets do not always go where they want them to go. So last night I go to make medicine, and ask the Great Spirit to help my men use the white man's weapon.

"Today you come. I see you shoot the wild goose on the wing. Never did I see the white man's rifle used so well. The Great Spirit has heard my call. You have come to show my warriors how to use the gun. The Great Spirit send you."

Fowler's face blanched.

Sitting Bull was determined we should stay with them, and become squaw men. It would be only a question of time, Fowler feared, until his past would be revealed, and the vengeance of the aborigine would be meted out upon him.

He protested that we must go. The great city at the mouth of the Mississippi called for us. In a few days we would be far down the river, away from the red man's territory.

Sitting Bull, however, was persistent, although his attitude was one of gentleness and firmness combined. He did not desire us to stay unwillingly. But if we would become fixtures among his band he would give us ponies.

We would be favorites among the Unkpappas, and share in the sale of furs equally with the bravest and most prominent of his warriors.

I had weakened, and was ready to join up with the outfit, but Fowler was determined to talk himself out of a bad situation if possible, and he orated at great length.

Sitting Bull's reply was to bring into the wigwam two squaws—one a beautiful girl of about sixteen, her hair decorated with two red feathers and her sylph-like body clad in buckskin, handsomely embroidered with beads, which betokened that she was not the daughter of a common Indian.

The other woman was perhaps forty, short and fat, but not without a certain amount of savage beauty.

The squaws stood eying us with indifference, although they evidently understood why they had been summoned, for they showed no surprise when Sitting Bull finally presented them to us as our wives, if we chose to become Unkpappas.

"Wamble Ishta," the Chief continued, "do you wish Schck-Oka (Little Robin) for your squaw?"

The young girl's face lighted with a radiant smile, and she stepped forward and accepted my proffered hand.

I had made up my mind. From that moment I was to become a ward of Sitting Bull. The civilized world could wag on as it would.

The thrills of the chase, the freedom of the primitive, of which I had so long dreamed, would from that moment be mine.

I passed my arm around the trim figure of Schck-Oka, and she looked up into my eyes smiling, murmuring the only English word she knew, the one she had heard from Sitting Bull—"Eagle Eyes."

Sitting Bull went through the same ceremony with Fowler, but I was wholly unmindful of it. My thoughts were of Schck-Oka, and the strange change that was to come into my life.

IV

THE days that followed my joining the Unkpappas were the most memorable in my life.

To say that I was overjoyed at the

thought of becoming a squaw-man is to put it mildly. The romance of it all appealed irresistibly to my youthful mind, although Old Dad was not particularly enamored with it.

In fact, he protested to me often that "no good would come of it."

To be sure he had less reason to look upon the situation enthusiastically.

He and his squaw had been comfortably established in a lodge not far from Sitting Bull, but I, to my amazement, was made a member of the Chief's own household.

The compliment, however, at the outset, was directed to Little Robin. She was a favorite of Sitting Bull.

At the suggestion of Sitting Bull, I adopted the native dress, or rather, lack of dress, for it consisted almost wholly of a breech clout and moccasins, with a cape-like blanket which I used in chilly weather, when I was not engaged in vigorous physical exertion.

My hair, which was as long as a sheik's when I left Minneapolis, reached below my collar at the time of my capture, and it was not long until the stiff black mane, by dint of constant brushing, and with the aid of a deerskin thong which I tied around my head, hung down to my shoulders.

At first my white skin was a matter of curiosity to the entire band, but sun and wind soon did their work. I was as tanned as a beach life-saver in mid-August, and there was little about my general appearance to distinguish me from my copper-colored comrades.

Little Robin took great delight in painting my face, and her artistic endeavors were a source of considerable amusement to Sitting Bull. But he got his best amusement out of Dad Fowler, who reluctantly appeared one day with his features smeared with red and yellow paint, and minus his prize possession—the gray imperial beard, which he had worn with such dignity when I had first met him in Winnipeg.

"Look at Big Eyes," Sitting Bull remarked, as he pointed to the old gentleman's large blue orbs, which seemed strangely out of place in a painted Sioux.

And from that time on Dad was known in the camp as Big Eyes, whose nickname I had jestingly given him in the presence of two half-breeds, who spread it through the entire village.

Although Sitting Bull had welcomed me as someone sent by the Great Spirit to teach his people the art of using the white man's weaopns, he was anything but lacking in expertness with the rifle himself. His favorite weapon was a Henry repeating rifle, which he could use much better than the average big game hunter of that period. I think everyone will agree with me, marksmanship was then at its best.

A morning or two after we had joined the Unkpappas, the Chief asked me to take his son, Crowfoot, but who was then called Little Bull, and test his marksmanship at a range I had established at the edge of the camp.

Fowler accompanied us, and in his enthusiasm to make a good impression, plunged into a voluble dissertation on the art of aiming a rifle, which presently found him speaking nothing but Sioux, in order to make Crowfoot understand.

While he was in the midst of his palaver, Sitting Bull joined us, and stood listening for some time before Dad was aware of his presence.

"Did Jumping Buffalo's friend teach his son to speak Dacotah (Sioux) too?" the Chief asked, as Dad turned about with a hang-dog expression on his face.

Fowler replied that he had learned the language from his father.

A grunt from Sitting Bull, and a shrug of his shoulders was the only reply. Yet it was enough to make me understand that Sitting Bull suspected my old friend had a very good reason for hiding the fact that he understood the Indian language when we had first been brought into the Chief's presence.

If he resented it, however, he never gave any indication of the fact, except that he kept a pretty close eye on Fowler for some time.

We had been shooting at a target about fifty yards away with my small rifle, and I had been able to uphold my reputation as a crack shot, though I had done nothing so expert as kill the wild geese on the wing.

I was "shooting way over my head," as they say nowadays, at the stirring moment when the gimlet-eyes of Sitting Bull first fixed themselves upon me, and I have never been able to do as well since that

time.

Crowfoot was a good pupil. He had made some creditable scores, and we were planning to wind up our practice when Sitting Bull asked for my rifle, ran his deep-brown eye (an unusual type among the Sioux) along the barrel, and handed a piece of birch bark about a foot and a half square to his son, motioned for the boy to walk out toward the target.

When Crowfoot had gone about fifty yards, his father called out in Sioux for him to hold up the bark. A moment later I was tremblingly awaiting while the Chief took aim.

The little rifle barked, knocking the target from the young man's hand. But he quickly regained it, and ran back to us, pointing gleefully to a hole not very far from the center of the bark.

"That is good practice to try Crowfoot's nerve," Sitting Bull observed.

But I wondered, as we made our way back to the wigwams, whether it was more trying on Crowfoot's nerves, or upon his father's.

V

ABOUT a week after we had joined Sitting Bull, the order was given to break camp, and start Southward.

The order passed through the village with the speed of the wind, and in an incredibly short time the lodges were taken down. Belongings were placked on ponies, and on the rude carts, which some of them drew, and to the accompaniment of a perfect bedlam of barking from the numerous dogs, and the shouts of squaws and children, we were off on a hegira that eventually would lead us to the Black Hills for the winter.

The trip was made by easy stages. Many times we camped for a week or more at points where trapping and hunting were good.

During these stops, I usually was out on trapping expeditions for the greater portion of the time. Sitting Bull saw to it that I was instructed in the art of using the bow and arrow, as well as instructed in the use of the rifle.

Crowfoot and I became good friends, and he often accompanied me when I ran my trap lines. He was a marvelous shot with the bow, and could be depended upon to provide us with all of the small game we needed.

Little Robin also went with me, and no one, I believe, ever had a woman who was a better companion, or a more industrious helpmeet.

She was an affectionate and kindly girl, and I never heard her utter a cross word in all the time I was with her.

She delighted in cooking game, and assisting in skinning the beaver which Crowfoot and Appearing Elk, a young brave whom Sitting Bull usually assigned to go with us on trapping expeditions, brought in.

During her spare time she busied herself at beadwork and moccasin making, at both of which arts she was very adept.

She had been taught the use of bow and arrow when she was very young, and although she was not nearly so skilful as the men with these rude weapons, and cared very little for hunting, on two occasions when we returned to camp we found she had killed a deer during our absence, skinned the animal and hung it up on a sapling.

Appearing Elk was one of the best buffalo hunters of the younger Unkpappas, and he was very eager for us to run across a herd of bison. That was the height of my ambition, and I shared his eagerness for a chance at the great animals. We were not forced to wait long.

Shortly after returning to camp with our furs one morning, we learned that a herd of buffalo had been seen late that day, and a big hunt was in prospect the next morning.

I was so excited I could hardly sleep, and was stirring about long before daylight, seeing that my "bull rifle" was in good shape for the chase.

Sitting Bull was enthused by the prospect, but he did not choose to join in the sport. Instead, he directed Appearing Elk, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse, a veteran hunter, and Crowfoot to look after me, and to see that I got a chance at the game.

The first streaks of the dawn were barely visible in the sky when the cry:

"Woo-ooh, Woo-ooh, Hay-ay" wailed through the village, and ponies were quickly corralled, and braves painted as if for battle, leaped astride, and were off for

the big hunt.

I was one of the few hunters, aside from Fowler, who carried a rifle.

I chose a buckskin pony, the best of the lot the Chief had given me, as the steed for that day, and off I dashed in company with my escort of three, arriving in sight of the buffalo after a ride of about three miles.

The advance party had swung around north of the herd and were driving them southward at a rapid rate when I got my first glimpse of the great wholly pack, racing across the prairies at breakneck speed, the earth fairly shaking under their tread, and the noise of hoof beats rolling like distant thunder.

"Woo-ooh, Hay-ay," cried Appearing Elk, grasping his heavy buffalo bow, which was fully nine feet long and two inches thick at the center, and fitting a lance-like arrow against the rawhide thong.

"Woo-ooh, Woo-ooh, Hay-ay," echoed Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse, and Crowfoot, and lashing their ponies into a furious gallop they were off with the speed of the wind.

As we neared the herd, on its left flank, my companions yelled to me to accompany them, and suddenly veered to their left. But I paid no heed to them.

Dashing up to within range, I let go with my Sharp's rifle, and had the pleasure of seeing a fine bull go tumbling over.

But my triumph was short-lived; the buckskin pony, already nervous because he had apparently never been in contact with a buffalo stampede before, reared and plunged like a demon at the crack of a gun, and it was all I could do to stop myself from being flung over his head.

I DID my utmost to calm the pony, but he had no sooner stopped his rearing and plunging than he suddenly seemed to go loco. Swinging abruptly southward, he dashed like a mad creature in the direction taken by my companions.

In a moment I saw what their game was. A precipitous hill, directly in line with the buffalo, a quarter of a mile south, made it certain that the herd leaders would veer eastward.

Two huge boulders showed up on the landscape, and behind these my Indian friends had chosen to take refuge, and plug the passing bison at will.

Crowfoot and Leaping Dog flung themselves from their ponies, and lay flat on the ground, while Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse took charge of their mounts, and retreated out of danger.

My pony had apparently about worn himself out, and was slackening speed, when the bison turned eastward. I raised my rifle and fired two shots in quick succession.

The devil broke out again in the pony, and he plunged like an eggshell in a tempest, finally throwing me to the ground, and stampeding wildly into the swirling cloud of dust that now almost obscured the frightened buffalo.

That was the last of the buckskin pony, for he was afterward knocked down and trampled to death under the herd of bison that swarmed over him.

I was busy picking up my gun and the ammunition which had fallen when I heard a shout of warning.

A wounded bull, forced out of the line by his injuries, saw my plight, and charged toward me. I raised my gun, but, to my horror, it missed fire. In a moment the frantic animal would have been upon me had I not succeeded in sidestepping it. But with a snort of anger it whirled, and made at me again.

This time I could not have evaded it, although it was suffering from a bullet wound through its withers, and its side was dripping with blood. Suddenly from behind one of the rocks a lance-like arrow winged its way, striking the bull in the side, and passing completely through its body.

It slackened its speed, trembled, and then started on. By this time I had my gun ready, and sent a bullet crashing behind its right shoulder, bringing it heavily to the ground.

Lying on his back, as is the custom, placing his toes against the center of his great bow, and pulling back the cord with both hands, Appearing Elk had sent a well-directed arrow at the charging bull, and saved my life. A sudden shift of the wind sent the dust cloud around me, until I was almost blinded.

I was afraid any moment more buffalo would come charging at me, and I started

on a mad dash in the direction of the rocks, of whose location I was not sure. As I struggled through the cloud, I heard the beat of hoofs, and was raising my gun to protect myself when, to my relief, I saw Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse galloping swiftly toward me leading the two other ponies.

Mounting one of the animals which was not gun-shy I galloped off and joined some thirty other Indians who were pursuing the herd and showering them with arrows. From that time on I gave a good account of myself, five bulls being brought down by my gun.

The main herd, after skirting the hill, darted southwest. But by this time we had all the game we needed. More than a hundred buffalo had been brought down, and it was an invariable order from Sitting Bull that the Unkpappas should not kill more buffalo than were needed by the band.

While the braves, assisted by a number of squaws, who had viewed the chase from the distance, were skinning the animals and preparing the carcasses for removal to the camp, I hunted out my three companions. Appearing Elk and Crowfoot, with their long bows, greeted me with smiling faces. Opposite their ambush lay thirteen dead bulls and three cows, all of which had fallen before their huge arrows.

"Him bad pony," Appearing Elk observed as I came up, "buffalo make him behave."

"Damn the pony," I shouted, "who was it saved my life? The bull would have got me sure if it had not been for one of you!"

Crowfoot pointed to Appearing Elk, who said not a word. And I threw myself from the pony, and hugged the savage, while tears of gratitude streamed down my face.

Game little Appearing Elk! A son of the wilds, but with a heart of gold! As an earnest of my thanks, I presented him that night with an old pepper-box revolver, the very first small arm I had ever owned.

It was my most valued possession next to my .50 calibre Sharp's rifle, and it tore my heart to part with it. But a gift is not a gift unless the giver feels a tugging at his heart when he presents it.

VI

SEVERAL days passed uneventually, then—"Whoo-ooh, Hay-ay, Hay-hay," came an owl-like cry from the distance.

"Woo-ooh, Hay-ay, Hay-ay," it was echoed from hundreds of throats.

Dashing across the prairie a few hundred yards away were a half dozen warriors, shouting the battle cry, and the village was thrown into wild excitement.

Ponies were hastily brought in from their tethers, and armed with bows and arrows or guns or both, according to their equipment, braves were preparing for action.

Without a word, Appearing Elk and I rushed to the village as fast as we could leg it.

Crowfoot was already astride his pony as we drew near to my lodge.

"Taka-ahe-da (the enemy) where is he?" shouted Appearing Elk.

The Chief's son pointed to the north.

"Sarcees," he replied. "Ten of our young men were returning from a scouting expedition, and camped in an arroyo, twelve miles westward. The Sarcees creep up in the night, and steal their ponies. They awaken, and try to give battle. But it is no use. The enemy has their horses, and they cannot follow."

We did not wait for more particulars. It was evident the Sarcees had fled northward toward the Canadian border, for their natural home was in the Northwest Territory, and it was seldom they wandered so far south, even upon their frequent raiding expeditions.

"Woo-ooh, Hay-ah, Yoo-We-Do," Crowfoot shrilled the war cry as he slapped his pony, and dashed away to the edge of the village, where the warriors were assembling.

At the door of our lodge, Sitting Bull, in war paint and feathers, came striding out.

"Ho mita koda (welcome friend)," he shouted with a show of enthusiasm at seeing me at the last moment. "Get your rifle and follow me."

But a moment was required for me to arm myself, and find my pony. I clattered up behind Sitting Bull, and with the Sioux war cry ringing in my ears went off in my first pursuit of an enemy.

Sitting Bull requested me to ride beside him.

"There may be work for you today," he exclaimed, "with your rifle."

In a little more than an hour, our party, which consisted of probably fifty, had reached the spot where the campers had been robbed by the Sarcees.

The thieves had a good start because their victims had been forced to run on foot to the village to spread the alarm. The trail was easily picked up. A half dozen braves, who were especially adept at tracking, were sent ahead, while the main party followed at about a quarter of a mile's distance.

For hours we rode, now and then losing the trail because the enemy had expected pursuit and had plunged into every creek, and traversed the bed for some distance, to throw us off the track.

In mid-afternoon the trail began to grow fresher. The jaded horses of the enemy, ridden as they had been for almost thirty hours straight, were in little better fettle than those they had captured.

The scouting expedition, returning Northeast, had also ridden hard until well into the night, hoping to be able to reach the village before they rested. At last, however, they had made camp in the arroyo without knowing about the presence of the Sarcees, who were heading south, and had evidently detected the Sioux, without making their own presence known until they had untethered the horses, and were making away with them.

Our horses were in prime condition, none of them having been ridden hard, except for the rather short buffalo chase of the previous day.

I was galloping along beside Sitting Bull when Gray Foot, one of the advance band, came riding to us, talking excitedly.

Sitting Bull, who had been observing the trail closely, knew his mission.

"How far ahead are they?" he inquired.

"Less than an hour's ride," was the reply.

Immediately word was passed to the pursuing party, which extended its formation, and proceeded ahead at redoubled speed. Less than thirty minutes later we heard the war cry sounded.

There was the crack of rifles as we rounded the brow of a slight hill, and a quarter of a mile distant we saw our vanguard engaged with the rear guard of the enemy, which consisted of perhaps twenty Sarcees.

THE advance party had been a trifle too venturesome, however, and three of the six, including Gray Foot, had been wounded. Before Sitting Bull and the rest of us could come within range, the Sarcees were off like the wind, to join those who had preceded them.

Sitting Bull's men at once spread out in a line which finally became two miles wide, and sought to outflank the enemy.

According to instructions, I remained beside the Chief, who by dint of hard riding, soon caught up with the three uninjured members of the tracking party, and went at the head of the pursuing forces.

Dusk was nearing when we finally dashed into a stretch of small timber, and were caught in a shower of arrows and bullets from the Canadian Indians, who had taken advantage of the shelter to attempt to beat back our forces.

An arrow, deflected by the bough of a tree, struck Sitting Bull in the shoulder, inflicting a slight wound. He plucked out the shaft with an exclamation of disgust, however, and threw it on the ground.

It was tough going, that dash through the timber, with the enemy well screened, and giving us the best they had in their bag of tricks. But we pressed on, and with the loss of two or three, and the injury of a dozen men, finally drove the Sarcees into the open country beyond. They dispersed in frantic flight, leaving all of the ponies except their mounts to fare as best they might.

As we darted out of the woods, I noted that there were no more than a dozen Sioux in sight.

Where the others had gone was a mystery to me until, a moment later, probably twenty Sarcees, with a show of bravery unusual for them, came dashing headlong toward us. They had been flanked, and then encircled by the Sioux on our left and right, and were evidently endeavoring to regain the shelter of the trees they had recently left.

Sitting Bull raised his old Henry repeater and fired at the leader of the oncoming band, but the range was too great.

A second time his rifle barked without doing any damage.

Reining my pony, I took careful aim with the heavy Sharp's rifle and, to my delight, the leader of the Sarcees lurched forward from his pony, drilled through the chest.

A second shot knocked down the pony of the Indian immediately behind the first victim, and the rider went spinning on his head.

By this time the range was getting short enough for the Chief's repeater, and the nondescript weapons of some of our companions. In less than five minutes twelve of the Sarcees were on the ground, and the others had again headed north, only to be shot down by the flanking party, who refused to show them any mercy.

The skirmish over, the surviving horses of the Sarcees having been captured, and the dead stripped of their arms, we headed south. I called Sitting Bull's attention to the wound in his shoulder, which was bleeding profusely.

"It's nothing, Eagle Eyes, he replied. "You have done well today. You killed the wadutah shunktokecha (red wolf), who led the thieves to steal our ponies. Your courage delights my heart. Hereafter you are as my own son."

After an hour's ride we encamped for the night, and the next morning started on a hard ride to the village, which we reached after an absence of thirty-six hours, and without tasting food since our departure.

VII

THE spring and summer that followed were the most wonderful in all my life. We roamed the great open places of the Northwest with care-free hearts. Buffalo, while not overly abundant, were still numerous enough to provide us plenty of food and excitement.

The fishing was excellent, and I fell into the mode of the primitive with such fervor that I would never have given it up, if Fate had not held a black card in her hand for my friend and mentor, Sitting Bull.

A half dozen times we engaged in brushes with Crows, who were continually laying in wait to steal our horses whenever we happened to be near their haunts. And I must say I rather enjoyed their forays, because they served to break the monotony of camp life.

Sitting Bull had been so well pleased with the improvement in general marksmanship of his warriors, which he attributed to a large extent to my assistance, that I seemed to grow in his favor, and I believe I was shown as many privileges in the camp as was Crowfoot himself.

Late in the spring, Sitting Bull, who apparently was most anxious for me to learn all of the nature-craft for which the Sioux were famous, assigned me to scouting duty, and even condescended to go with my companions on our first trip.

A day out from camp, we ran across a small band of Crows, who had been hanging onto our flank, and occasionally picking up a few of our stray ponies. We overtook them after a wild ride across the plain.

One of their number, who was apparently in command, wore an elaborate headdress of yellow feathers. I never did know his name, but apparently those gimlet-eyes of Sitting Bull were able to make him out, although he was then half a mile away.

"See," Sitting Bull said, as he reined his pony beside me, "the Crow with the yellow feathers. He is the leader of the horse thieves. If we get him, we will not be bothered again soon."

I knew from the intonation and gestures that he wished the honor of killing the Indian rustler to rest on my shoulders, and I dashed away with all the speed of which my pony was capable, swinging to the left, and circling with a view to cutting off the fugitive Crows before they could reach some hills in the distance, which they were evidently trying to make, before giving battle.

A half dozen of the Unkpappas followed close behind me at top speed, but it was probably a half hour before we came in range. But it was no ordinary Indian horse thieves we had encountered. They could ride like centaurs, were well armed, and knew how to use their weapons.

Seeing that they would be unable to reach the hills before giving battle, they whirled, and dropping along the sides of their ponies, with their rifles sticking out under the necks of their steeds, they swung at right angles to us and began a hot fire.

The range, however, was too great at the outset, and their bullets merely kicked up a rain of dust some two hundred feet in front of us.

Appearing Elk, who was a perfect devil in a fight, shot past me with a warwhoop that would awaken the dead, and dashed madly at the enemy, while I pounded my pony's ribs in an effort to make it keep up with my friend. We had scarcely arrived in range when a bullet passed through Appearing Elk's shoulder, and caused him to drop his rifle, and a moment later his pony was shot from under him.

Seeing the foremost Sioux fall, the Crow in the yellow headdress turned abruptly to his left, and rode straight for us, holding his rifle against his shoulder, and his bow and arrow in easy reach.

By this time I had reached the side of Appearing Elk, who was lying on the ground, blood trickling down his great muscular arm, which was now rendered useless, signing for me to pay no attention to him, but to open up on the enemy. I sprang from my pony, held the rein over my arm, and took deliberate aim at the wildly yelling Crow who was bearing down upon us.

As my big Sharp's cracked, he threw up his hands and leaned backward, but the pony's speed was unchecked, and he continued his wild charge.

I quickly reloaded my gun, and fired a second shot, which struck the pony in the head and brought it to its knees, probably ten yards in front of me, while the rider was hurled almost at my feet.

The Crow held up his hands for mercy. He had lost his weapons in the fall, and was quite powerless anyhow, as blood was gushing from a hole in his chest.

A moment later, Appearing Elk sprang to his feet, and with his uninjured left arm had raised his rifle high above him, and was about to bring it crashing down on his enemy's head, when we heard a shrill yell behind us.

It was the voice of Sitting Bull. He had started with the other Sioux who had swung to the left after the rest of the Crow band, brought down one of the enemy, and then had turned to witness the outcome of my little private fight.

"No," cried the Chief. "The Crow has fought bravely. Do not let your wound make a brute of you"

A moment later he was beside us, but the death rattle was in the wounded man's throat. I picked up his rifle, tore off his headdress, which I presented to the Chief, and a moment later we were off after the rest of the wildly scurrying Crows. By this time they had been so badly shot up that only two or three of the original twelve were giving real battle. The skirmish did not last much longer.

Appearing Elk's shoulder was badly injured, and another Sioux had been killed, but aside from these there were no casualties, although only two of the Crows, as far as we were able to determine, made their escape. That night, as we sat about our campfire, Sitting Bull placed his hand on my shoulder in the presence of our entire little band, and said:

"Eagle Eyes, my heart beats for you. You have killed the thieving chief whom I hate. You have saved Appearing Elk's life. You have a Dacotah's heart."

His kind words fanned my pride to a flame, to be sure, but they did not thrill me as much as the knowledge that I had really repaid Appearing Elk for his good turn in preventing me from being gored to death by a buffalo in my neophyte days. I thus expressed myself, falteringly, to Sitting Bull.

His only reply was a grunt and a shrug of the shoulders, which may or may not have indicated satisfaction with my reply.

VIII

FROM that time on I acted as a sort of bodyguard and a sort of gunman for Sitting Bull. Never again did I participate in any actual fights in which the Chief was engaged. But on several occasions he directed me to watch out for his particular enemies when I was on scout duty, and I accounted for three of his most hated foes, to his great delight.

By midsummer the Chief's attitude changed. He was apparently preoccupied and worried. He was often in council with Gall, Lone Bull, Crazy Horse and others of the powerful Sioux chiefs he had gathered about him.

I did not know what the trouble was then, but I know now it was because of the difficulties the Sioux were having with

the whites.

The Big Horn territory and the North Platte had been ceded to the Sioux by the Government, and no white man, under its terms, was permitted to settle there, or to pass through without the Indian's permission. But the treaty was even then being violated, and a year later it was shamefully disregarded by the whites when gold was discovered in the Black Hills, and the rush of prospectors to Dakota and Montana occurred.

But in the fall of '75 even war clouds were hanging low over us, although I was kept in perfect ignorance of the situation, and evidently was assigned to tasks that would keep me from coming into contact with the whites, or learning what was going on.

Fowler and I seldom saw each other, and I doubt if he knew much more of the true condition of affairs than I, although with his great experience he stood a much better chance of getting correct information.

For weeks the Sioux had been promised a Sun Dance, and at last the long delayed event was held. It was the first and last one I ever care to see, a test of courage and endurance that brings a shudder to me every time it comes to my mind. Just why this dance was held at this time now becomes significant, but it meant nothing unusual to me then.

A young brave comes out to participate in the dance. Quickly a sub-chief assigned to the task takes a keen knife and makes two deep slits in the muscles of his back, just over the kidneys. The dancer must not allow an eyelash to quiver or a sound to escape his lips, but must stand erect while a rawhide thong, suspended from a pole, is passed through the bleeding slits, and he is lifted off the ground.

If he stands the task with the stoicism required, he has proven his bravery. If he has shown the slightest sign of weakening, or faints, he is branded a squaw, and must be henceforth treated as one.

A half dozen or more young braves went through this sickening ceremony with credit to themselves, according to their standards.

Then out stepped one of the most handsome Indians I have ever seen, muscled like a Greek god, and his face bearing the expression of a zealot who has flogged his courage to the sticking point, and is eager and willing to step into the flames, and die a martyr.

He stood like a statue while a muscular hand grabbed the flesh back of his kidneys, and rudely thrust a hunting knife through it. There was never a quiver when the operation was repeated a second time, or when the rawhide thong was drawn tight, and he was swept off the ground.

"Do what you will," he shouted, as the blood trickled down his swinging legs, and formed a pool beneath him. "No one can wring a moan from my lips. I have the heart of a Dacotah. I wonder if all of you who look on can say as much?"

Taunting his torturers, defying them to apply more violence, and boasting of his courage, which although I had never seen him before I knew was of the greatest, even though the test before my very eyes had not demonstrated it to me, he swung for some time, and then the flesh gave way and he fell to the ground.

Leaping up with a smile of triumph, Rain-in-the-Face shouted:

"Have I not proven my words? If you doubt me, you may swing me up again."

SITTING BULL, who had stood like a piece of sculpture, his gimlet-eyes blazing as he heard the boasting of his brave, was apparently much displeased with the cockiness of the warrior and the taunts he had thrown out while undergoing the torture. Perhaps Sitting Bull felt that Rain-in-the-Face, ambitious to become a powerful Sioux leader, had aimed some of his taunts at him.

With raised hand he stepped into the circle.

"Do as he has bid you," the Chief exclaimed. "Make the cuts deeper, and let him dance again. Perhaps his courage is not quite as great as he would have us believe."

Sitting Bull fixed his fiery eyes on the younger man, who met them steadily, and with the utmost indifference.

Again the cruel knives tore more deeply into his flesh. Again the rawhide thong was passed through the wounds, and he was hoisted into the air, singing, shouting, and waving his long sinewy arms in a sort of wild rhythm.

I could stand the sight no longer, and withdrew. But the Sun Dance went on. The following day I returned for a moment, because I did not believe it possible that Rain-in-the-Face was still enduring that intense suffering without a moan.

But there he was as before, only now he was swinging more vigorously, kicking in an effort to force the tortured muscles to tear loose, and permit him to escape, but defiant and haughty as when he had first stepped into the circle to meet the ordeal.

Still a second day I returned, drawn to the spot by the horror of it. His legs encrusted with coagulated blood, and a scarlet trickle still oozing from around the cruel thong, but with his face aflame, and his spirit undaunted, the warrior was as defiant as ever.

But now his suffering was to cease. Sitting Bull was apparently discouraged at the endurance shown by Rain-in-the-Face, or he was eager to reward him.

He watched the tortured brave for some minutes, then signed to some of the warriors in charge. A moment later two heavy buffalo skulls were tied to the feet of the suspended stoic. You could see the muscles start to rip as the heavy weights were attached, but the war song only increased in clearness as Rain-in-the-Face kicked and tugged to show his indifference

At last, after two days, the flesh could withstand the strain no longer, and the stoic dropped to the ground on the buffalo skulls. Quickly he arose to his feet, and pointing to the throng about him, his finger moving in a circle, he cried:

"Now do you believe in me, or am I a squaw?"

Sitting Bull strode forward, placed his hand on the bronzed shoulder of the warrior whose lower limbs were reeking with blood, and shouted in words and tones which permitted no misinterpretation:

"Rain-in-the-Face, you are *not* a squaw. There are others as brave as the Dacotahs. There are no Dacotahs braver than you. Hereafter you will sit high in the councils of the Dacotahs, and you will be a scourge to our enemies."

And the tortured hero was carried to his tepee on the shoulders of admiring friends, amid the wildest shouts of approval, in which I joined with all the strength of my lungs. He had withstood a test that no other Sioux, or for that matter any other man, had ever stood.

THE following day after Rain-in-the-Face made his first appearance in public, I went out on a scouting expedition which lasted some time. When I returned there was an unmistakable gloom about the camp. Sitting Bull greeted me with a frigidity that I could not understand, and it was not until little Schch-Oka unburdened herself that night, that I learned the truth of the situation. Washechu (white men) had come.

They had accussed Rain-in-the-Face of slaying and scalping a soldier who was on his way home from the fort, and had taken him away, presumably to Ft. Abraham Lincoln, near Bismarck. No one knew what his fate was to be.

My wife's voice dropped to a low whisper.

"Oh, Wamble Ishta," she said, "I fear many troubles are in store. My people are so cruelly grieved by the way the white men have acted.

"They have taken almost everything away from the Dacotahs, their land, their game, their furs. Now they come and seize brave Rain-in-the-Face, and will perhaps murder him.

"Sitting Bull is growing more bitter every day. All the happiness has gone out of his life. He goes to his lodge alone, and makes medicine.

"He talks with Gall and Crazy Horse and other chiefs until far into the night. My mother tell me we may expect a great war, and much sorrow."

Tears came into her eyes, her lips trembled as she spoke, and I knew she was wondering whether the outcome of the war she feared would mean our separation, for she knew that I had an understanding with Sitting Bull that my hand would never be raised against my own people.

I comforted her as best I could, and tried to show her that if Rain-in-the-Face had waylaid the soldier, as had been charged (and afterward proven), he must take his medicine, and there was no reason why we should fear it would bring on a war.

Rain-in-the-Face was brave, yes, very,

very brave. But even the brave could be very wicked, I assured her, and perhaps after all Rain-in-the-Face had gotten just what he deserved.

Little Robin put her hand up to my mouth, and an expression of terror came over her face.

"Oh, please, please, Wamble Ishta," she cried, "never, never say that before my people. Even Sitting Bull, who looks on you as his son, would not spare you if he heard you say that."

And to appease her I promised I would not.

IX

THE days passed slowly, dragging days when happiness seemed to have left every heart in the band, and when it seemed that any moment a spark might be laid to the touchwood which greed had scattered everywhere about us.

Occasionally Fowler and I got an opportunity to converse. The old man realized that the situation was getting desperate, unless something happened soon to pacify the Sioux, whose patience was at the breaking point.

Then one evening, shortly before dusk, we saw a familiar, erect, tall figure, astride a foam-flecked pony, silhouetted against a thickening sky, riding wildly toward the camp. A shout went up. Others rushed out to see what had happened.

"Rain-in-the-Face, Rain-in-the-Face has returned," someone yelled, and the cries increased to the point of hysteria. Into the village he dashed, his pony's nostrils distended and its legs quivering under the strain of the whirlwind gallop. Like an arrow, the huge warrior leaped from his steed, and stood smiling as the Sioux people crowded around him with excitement.

"I have returned," he shouted, drawing himself up to his six feet two, "but the 'Washechu' will see me again. They will see me, and they will feel the weight of my war club, and the bite of my knife.

"I tell you, the Indians on the reservation where the whites would have us all placed are nothing but prisoners. They are slaves of the 'Washechu.' But Rain-in-the-Face will never again be their prisoner.

"I have felt the lash of the white man's whip on my back. My wrists have been torn, and my blood stained the chains with which one of their Chiefs (Tom Custer, brother of General Custer) dragged me behind a swift cart, so that all might see my humiliation.

"The Sioux may be made slaves, but before they all are, Rain-in-the-Face must be killed. Some day I will meet that white Chief (Tom Custer) again. I shall slay him, and eat his heart."

And, having finished his heated harangue, he strode off majestically for a conference with Sitting Bull and other Chiefs.

Rain-in-the-Face had escaped from the prison at the fort through the kindness of an American soldier who was disgusted with the brutality with which he had been treated, and who had fired a shot in the air as a bluff, when the Sioux darted out of the opening which the guard had made for him.

It was said in the village that Rain-in-the-Face had urged the chiefs to make instant war on the whites, that the suggestion had been frowned upon, and that he was very resentful as a result. In any event, he disappeared from our band soon afterward, and I understand spent his time with some of the more irreconcilable of the Sioux hostiles, under Inkpaduta, leader of the Spirit Lake, Iowa, massacre, Two Moons and others.

Sitting Bull made considerable of the fact that Rain-in-the-Face had owed his liberty to a soldier, and emphasized this as an indication that some of the whites really had hearts, which went a long way toward establishing a better feeling among his followers.

Gradually the tension lessened, and something approaching the old-time carefree existence of the outfit returned. We hunted, fished and trapped until the Moon of Wild Cherries (September), and then started back to our winter quarters in the Black Hills, which was destined to be the last time we should assemble there.

Our hunting was confined very largely that year to the vicinity of the Black Hills, where we went into winter quarters again considerably earlier than the previous season.

The cold was not so extreme, and while

game was considerably scarcer than it had been, trapping still continued to be very good, and we led a rather contented existence from a physical standpoint. But all the time I kept seeing more and more indications that a crisis might be expected at any time.

Sitting Bull was less communicative than when I had first met him, but continued to show his usual friendliness for me, and was particularly glad that I was able this winter to do much more work in repairing and sighting the rifles which had been considerably augmented from various sources not revealed to me.

LATE in April we broke camp, and started on our seasonal nomadic existence. Nothing of particular interest happened that spring except that by hook or crook I was kept out of contact with Dad Fowler except for a few minutes late in May. Then we had a conversation in which the old man expressed a great desire to get away from Sitting Bull, and complete our long contemplated trip to New Orleans. It was rudely interrupted by two braves, who summoned me to the Chief's lodge.

The details of that conversation, which did not make a very decided impression on my mind, have escaped me, except that I noted Sitting Bull was unusually troubled, or professed to be, about the scarcity of game in the district, and asked if I would not like to take Schch-Oka and several other braves and their squaws on a hunting trip, with a view to locating a herd of buffalo which were badly needed for food.

Life in the village had become quite irksome and I hailed the suggestion with much gratification.

There was almost a note of tenderness in the harsh voice of Sitting Bull as I bade him goodbye. He grasped my hand, held it in a vise-like grip for a few moments and fastened his gimlet-like eyes on mine as he said:

"Farewell, Wamble Ishta; may your hunting trip be successful. If the Washechu (white men) I have known were all like you, I would not have hate in my heart as it is today."

He referred, of course, to the violation of the treaty of 1868 by the hordes of white men who came pouring into the Black Hills, following the discovery of gold, though none were permitted by the terms of the agreement to enter the territory without permission from the Sioux, and the cry which the prospectors sent up that all the Indians be banished to reservations.

He stood beside his pony, waving farewell to me as I and my party started off on the journey, keeping those piercing eyes on us until we disappeared from view.

As I have stated, I do not know whether the Chief had anticipated a clash between the Sioux and the Americans or not. It is unlikely that he did know when a battle would occur, but, in all probability, with that strange gift of premonition he possessed, he saw the inevitable was not far away.

Hunting was poor, and our disappointment was keen when we failed to locate any large numbers of buffalo. After being away almost a month, we started back to join Sitting Bull's forces.

I can remember the afternoon of June 26, 1876, with great vividness. It was quite by chance that we did not arrive back in our camp on June 25. Had we done so, I would have been with Sitting Bull at the time of the Custer massacre.

However, as we neared the Little Big Horn, we discovered some fresh buffalo tracks, and wasted almost a day following them, without success.

The afternoon of the 26th I noted that it would be difficult to reach the village until late, and as we were wearied by our long trudge, we made a camp about three o'clock, and decided to complete the trip in the morning.

WE heard considerable firing beyond the Little Big Horn, but I paid little attention to it, thinking undoubtedly it was some of Sitting Bull's braves shooting up a marauding band of horse-stealing Crows. The next day, after crossing to the west bank of the Little Big Horn and ascending a slope, we came across a battlefield, strewn with dead.

General George A. Custer and his five companies of 260 men had been surrounded, and the very firing that we had heard the previous afternoon had sounded the deathknell for every one of that heroic

band.

I stood as one paralyzed, surveying the bloody scene. The bodies of horses and men littered the slope, but by far the majority of the victims had met death in a group, battling it out to the last man against the overwhelming encircling force which had subjected them to a withering fire from every angle.

The name of Custer meant nothing to me at that time, and I had no idea who had led the victims into this death trap. Many of the bodies had been terribly mutilated, stripped of equipment and clothing, and scalped.

In one body I counted six arrows, which shows how determined had been the resistance, and how terrible the fire to which the soldiers had been subjected.

The sight was so sickening that I could not stand it long. I do not know that I actually saw Custer's body, although I do remember the form of one long-haired man which had not been desecrated by the victors.

I do not believe there was a single gun or revolver left on the battlefield after the Sioux had moved on, and robbed as they were of their equipment, and most of their uniforms in addition to the mutilation, identification of any of the dead would have been almost impossible.

The gruesome discovery fairly stunned me. I could hardly make up my mind what to do, or where to go. I was a squaw man, made so by my captivity, and my youthful thirst for the picturesque and novel. Where would I turn now?

Would I endeavor to join the soldiers which I knew would be swarming through the district in pursuit of the Sioux, or would I flee the district entirely?

My wife, who had joined me as I retreated from the battlefield, refusing to join our companions, who were rummaging about among the dead with keenest satisfaction, saw the emotion which beset me.

"At last it has come, oh, Wamble Ishta," she exclaimed, and tears trickled down her stoical little face.

"The dead lie like leaves upon the ground. They are all palefaces. It is as Sitting Bull said when he returned from making medicine. But—may there be no more battles!"

It was a pathetic figure she presented as she stood, grief-stricken, uttering the age-old protest of her sex against the grim game of war.

Grasping Little Robin by the arm, I shouted to my companions to come with us, but they paid no heed to me—men and women alike, who had by this time given up the search for plunder, were taking scalps from the dead.

It was with difficulty that I restrained myself from opening fire upon them, but after all—that was their nature, their warriors had won a great battle, which had been forced upon them, because Custer had attacked them, and from their viewpoint they were entitled to the trophies of the victory.

Without more adieu I took Little Robin by the arm, and we wandered away in silence for possibly three miles before I could make up my mind to discuss the future with her. There is no need to go into the heartaches of that conference.

She, of course, did not want to desert her people, and she was very insistent that I pick up the Sioux trail, and join them. I pointed out that this was impossible, that it meant almost certainly I should be called upon to fight against my own race, for there was no doubt that the white soldiers would pursue Sitting Bull.

She talked for hours of Sitting Bull's affection for me; how he did not want war, and would not have fought the soldiers had they not provoked the battle, and she professed to believe no more fighting would take place.

At last I told her she must choose between Sitting Bull's people and me, and started back, with Deadwood as my objective.

For three days she accompanied me, frequently, however, grabbing me by the arms, and urging me to revoke my decision, or starting back westward again, running like a fawn and glancing over her shoulder hoping that I would follow her.

Finally, after she had found this ruse unsuccessful, she bade me farewell, with bitter ears, and started back over our trail. I had expected to see her turn again and rejoin me, but she never did. And I pursued my way with a heavy heart.

During the long journey to Deadwood, the details of which I shall not recount, I

made up my mind that "Wamble Ishta" would go out of existence, and Walter J. Winters would again take his place.

The first place I should head for, I said to myself, was a barber shop, where my long black tresess would be snipped off, after which I would array myself in the white man's more burdensome clothing and go back to civilization for good. So much for resolutions!

X

UPON reaching Deadwood, I bethought myself of the fact, which had not occurred to me, that money was needed in civilization, and the few dollars I had carried with me during all these years were not enough to get me very far.

Perhaps I had best set about to find a job before I indulged in a transformation. That was easier said than done, and after a few days of failure, I found myself wondering all the time what had become of Sitting Bull, and wishing that I had at least looked into the situation more carefully before heading East.

The spell of the aborigine, I found, was still in my views, and the less colorful existence of the white man had not yet offered a strong appeal. "Wamble Ishta" had refused to "kick in."

At last I fell in with a party of immigrants who were heading for Northern Montana. They wanted a guide, and offered me the job. While my experience in that country was meager, I readily accepted, and we started off, eventually arriving at our destination.

My services were no longer in demand, and I was again without plans for the future.

Try as I would, I could get no word at all of Dad Fowler. At last I came to the conclusion that I would rejoin Sitting Bull, if possible, if for no other reason than to learn my old companion's fate, and perhaps I could be of assistance to him.

"Big Eyes," I knew, had never had the standing with the great Chief that I had, and it occurred to me that perhaps he was longing to escape from the band, and would be unable to do so unless, perhaps, I could prevail upon Sitting Bull to permit him to leave.

In the vicinity of old Fort Lincoln, quite by chance, I came across two Indians who had escaped from the reservation, and were attempting to find their way back to Sitting Bull. They had been captured some weeks before, and had promised to stay on the reservation, but had taken French leave at the first opportunity.

BOTH of them had, or professed to have, participated in the battle of the Little Big Horn. They both remembered me well, although I did not know them, and readily gave their version of the battle.

I was not so much interested in the details of the fight as I was in the present whereabouts of Sitting Bull and the fate of Big Eyes. As to the Chief, they did not know. But when I mentioned Fowler, they became reluctant to talk.

Realizing that something was wrong, I pressed them for details. I told them of my fast friendship for Appearing Elk, how I had saved his life, and he had saved mine, of the high regard with which their Chief held me.

Finally they told me poor old Dad was dead. He had refused to participate in the battle, and in a burst of anger had been struck down and killed by Rain-in-the-Face, who professed to believe he had been guilty of an attempt at treachery.

I learned afterward from Lone Eagle, whose foster father was in the battle, that the real reason for Fowler's assassination was the fear that he might tell the whites some of the details of the massacre he had witnessed.

You can readily realize what a terrible blow the announcement was to me. Dad Fowler had been my friend through thick and thin, and I had learned to look upon him with the same reverence, respect, and even love as though he had been my own father.

The announcement had ruthlessly shoved all the romance out of my dreams of rejoining Sitting Bull. There was but one more thing I wished to know.

"What of Schch-Oka?"

She had in some miraculous way managed to join her people, and had married a young brave who had distinguished himself in the battle of the Little Big Horn, and had thus met with great favor from Sitting Bull.

The two Sioux urged me to accompany them in the search for Sitting Bull, who was then being buffeted from pillar to post by the soldiery.

I shook my head.

"Sitting Bull," I said, "has no doubt forgot Wamble Ishta, and wishes to see him no more."

But they hastened to reassure me. "Eagle Eyes," one of them interrupted, "you are mistaken. Sitting Bull has asked for you many times. He tried every way to find a trace of you. And then Schch-Oka return, and say you have gone toward the rising sun. That make him very unhappy. Come with us."

That night, when they were asleep, I crept away, and started off through the wilderness alone, resolved to go into the Northwest Territory.

THE following spring, after taking French leave of the wandering Sioux, found me in what is now Northern Saskatchewan.

There again Wamble Ishta triumphed over Walter Winters, and to make a long story short, I bought a handsome young squaw for a bucket of sugar, and lived with the Blackfoot Indians for more than a year.

The fishing and trapping were excellent, although the big game hunting had not come up to my expectations. I had managed to get considerable out of trapping, and possibly I should have been contented.

I engaged in a few brushes with pillaging Sarcees, and seemed to be in the good graces of the Chief, who went by the name of a much more famous Indian of an earlier period, Black Hawk.

He, however, possessed few of the sterling qualities of Sitting Bull. He was not a born leader as was the great Sioux Chief and I was shown little more consideration than any other member of the band.

Possibly I had been spoiled by the favoritism Sitting Bull had shown me. At any rate, I determined to leave the Blackfoot, and head for British Columbia.

My squaw, E-tah-tah, but whom I had given the English name of Elsie, was determined to accompany me West, and I was equally determined that she remain behind with her mother. I divided equally with her my posessions, ponies, equipment and furs, and prepared to say farewell. But the Blackfoot lady was not disposed to have it that way.

Rising to her full height, and with flashing eyes, she wanted to know why she could not accompany me. I replied that the trip into the wild country would be one of many hardships which a woman should not attempt to undergo.

"And am I a child?" she demanded. "Am I a weakling that I cannot go where any white man—Blackfoot or white—can go? No, that is not the reason. You may kill me but you cannot leave me behind."

I tried all of my forensic powers upon her, but there was no way of changing her mind, so I pretended to give up the idea of the trip for the present. That night, I stole away from the lodge, and by morning was thirty miles away. Because of the danger of roving Indians who might take a liking to my horses, and who were none too friendly with the whites, I slept during the day, and traveled by night.

The third day out I had hobbled my horses in some heavy brush, and preparatory to starting on another day's march I ascended a little knoll to take my bearings, shortly before sundown.

To the east I caught a glimpse of a pony whose rider was proceeding cautiously and evidently studying my trail. Convinced that I was in trouble, I made my way down, and coolly took up a position behind a boulder a few hundred yards east of my camp, with my rifle aimed at the newcomer, who was then almost in range.

I had decided that it was probably better to shoot and ask questions later, and was about to squeeze the trigger, when the rider, who was leaning low over the farther side of the pony, chanced to straighten up, and it flashed upon me that Elsie was my pursuer.

"Oh, kill me!" she shouted; "kill me if you will, but do not make me turn back."

She had followed me for three days, picking up my trail with that rare instinct which all Indians possess, and making better headway than I had, for she had left our lodge some six hours after I did.

I hadn't the heart to tell her to turn back.

"Come with me, little one," I said, "as long as you will. I will never try to leave you again."

She threw herself at my feet, and clasped her arms about my knees.

"To the end of the world," she sobbed. And I believe I was as happy as she that we had been reunited.

We returned to the Blackfoot camp, got all of our outfit, and then proceded West together. No one ever had a better pal on a journey of that kind.

For five years we wandered throughout the far Northwest, finally going on a Mackenzie River expedition with two Swede boys whom I had met in Deadwood.

We had decided to start a trading post at the head of the Yukon, and at Great Slave Lake traded our outfit for dogs, and proceeded to mush the district. None of us were fitted for his sort of traveling, however.

The snow eventually became very deep, and after getting lost in a blizzard, but finally getting our bearings, we gave up, and returned East.

Elsie and I took up a ranch not far from the present city of Calgary.

A year later Elsie died, and I got a job as boss of a pack train, and went to Fort Benton, thence to Lewiston, finally doubling back to Deadwood again, where I hunted up the first available barber, and had my long black tresses cropped close to my scalp.

The barber, who seemed to think my long hair would make a good ornament for his shop, tied a string around the long locks, and hung them in his window. When I stepped out of the barber shop, "Wamble Ishta" was no more.

Walter Winters had taken his place. Never again did I go back to Indian life. I finally fell in love with a school teacher from the East, and we were married, eventually settling on the ranch, on which the town named after me is located. We have since raised a family and have prospered.

SQUAW KILLER

By JAMES G. BLADE

Scorned by his fellow warriors, taunted by the relentless foe, The Wolf works his own brand of Shoshone medicine on the squaw-killing Pahkee axe-man.

THE WOLF FLUNG HIS AXE. End over end it hurtled through the air and smashed into the skull of the Pahkee warrior it was aimed at. The Pahkee fell screaming from his horse. The Wolf glanced around at the nine warriors, who, with a constant, deadly stream of arrows, were still fighting off the thirty Pahkees.

But it couldn't last. The odds against them were too heavy.

There had been thirteen Shoshone warriors, and their women and children, in the little buffalo-hunting party when the Pahkees attacked. But three of the Shoshones lay dead between there and the river, where the fight had started. While the warriors covered their retreat, the women and children were urging the slow travois horses—packed with all the Shoshones' camp gear and winter's buffalo meat—toward a high, square butte.

A magnificently-proportioned Pahkee, mounted on a great spotted pony with long legs and a barrel chest, left his fellows and came thundering up. The Wolf waited coolly, his eyes taking in every detail of horse and rider. The horse was the finest he had ever seen.

The Wolf nocked an arrow, waited until the Pahkee was within thirty feet of him, and shot.

But the Pahkee received the arrow on his buffalo-hide shield, then lowered the shield and launched his own arrow. Gray Badger, fighting beside the Wolf, gasped and fell from his horse with the arrow through his throat. His riderless pony went pounding away. A Pahkee cut from the band and caught it.

Even the biting anger that the death of Gray Badger, the husband of his sister, inspired in the Wolf, could not suppress the great admiration he felt for the Pahkee. It was a daring thing to do, and a taunting yell arose from the Pahkees as the warrior on the spotted horse wheeled and thundered away. A storm of Shoshone arrows followed, but none touched him.

The Wolf glanced behind him. Lashing the travois horses and running themselves, the women and children were very near the butte now. At a signal from the Wolf, the warriors turned and rode toward them. The Wolf thought longingly of turning around, pitting himself against the warrior on the spotted horse. But that was impossible. His was the leadership of the Shoshone band and he was responsible for them. He rode half turned about in the saddle, watching the Pahkees' thundering pursuit. The warriors on the spotted horse rode ten feet ahead of the rest, but drew back when the Wolf slowed a little. All the Pahkees had learned a wholesome respect for the Wolf's bow.

Swinging around to look at the women and children, the Wolf bent over the neck of his own war horse. The horse remained as cool as its rider, and the Wolf patted his neck approvingly. No warrior worthy of the name could fight unless he had a good horse to hear him. But the spotted horse. . . . If the Wolf had that he would be better mounted than any other Shoshone.

AGAIN, when the Wolf raised his hand, the Shoshones wheeled suddenly and loosed a flight of whispering arrows. Close at their heels, and unprepared because their enemies were on the run, the surprised Pahkees drew up. The nine Shoshones shot, nocked their bows and shot again. Three of the Pahkees fell. A horse screamed and stampeded with two

Desperately The Wolf flung his axe. End over end it hurtled through the air and smashed into the skull of the Pahkee warrior it was aimed at.

arrows in its flanks. Two more tumbled to the ground, flinging their riders over their heads.

Keeping his shield up, the warrior on the spotted horse again rode in front of his companions, seeking an opportunity to thrust with his lance—apparently he had already shot all the arrows in his quiver. The Wolf's arrow thudded against the shield and bounded off. But no Shoshone aimed at the spotted horse.

Taking advantage of the Pahkees' confusion, the Shoshones again turned and thundered toward the women and children, now within a few feet of the trail leading up the butte. The retreat had been well covered—no Pahkee had been able to get any booty save the horses of the fallen Shoshones and none of the women or children were harmed. The Wolf drew his fighters into battle array at the foot of the trail leading up the butte as the women, each urging two or three travois horses, started single file toward the butte's summit. When the last of the women and children were gone, the warriors, loosing their horses to follow and holding their bows ready, began the perilous ascent on foot.

A curtain of thick yellow dust arose at the bottom of the dry butte. The Pahkees were dim, almost unseen shapes through it. The last warrior to dismount, the Wolf slapped his horse on the rump and started it up the narrow, steep trail hewn in the face of the butte. Walking backwards, his bow nocked, the Wolf began the ascent.

From somewhere out in the dust a tiny cry cut through the din of battle. A woman shrieked, and her hurtling body left the trail to land sprawled in the dust at the bottom of the butte. For a second she lay motionless there, then got up and started running frantically toward the Pahkees.

It was the Wolf's sister, Duck Woman. In the melee her baby had somehow been left behind and she had returned for it. The Wolf cursed, started running back down the trail.

For a bare second the dust cleared, and he saw the Pahkee on the spotted horse riding furiously toward the girl. He came beside her, raised his axe, and sank it in her skull. She wilted to the ground. The Pahkee picked the baby up, swung it gleefully aloft, and carried it back to his fellows.

ON top of the butte the Wolf sat alone. Their gaudy blankets revealing only their glistening black hair and dusky faces, the women gathered together and did not speak. Not understanding, and afraid because they could not understand, the children crouched close to their mothers and either whimpered softly or were silent. Two of the Shoshone warriors, bows in their hands and a great heap of arrows by their side, sat at the head of the trail. Any Pahkee who attempted the ascent had to come up the path, and there was room for only one person at a time on it. The men could easily defend the butte against any attack by the Pahkees.

Naked except for breech-clouts and moccasins, scalp locks rising from the center of their shaven, glistening heads, the six warriors not on guard duty sat with their backs to the Wolf. The Wolf writhed under their unspoken contempt. He who had been one of the mightiest warriors, who had gained great honors in battle and had even counted coup on the feared grizzly bear, must return to his village—provided any of the band returned there at all—a shunned, contemptible thing whose tasks from now on would be to help the women. He could not ride to war any more, would not even be allowed to hunt!

Gray Badger had died as a warrior should die, in honorable battle. No one need feel sorry for him and none need reproach himself because he had not been able to help him. But the most abject disgrace any warrior could suffer was to see his woman killed by an enemy without avenging her—at the cost of his own life if necessary. Being already dead, Gray Badger could not avenge Duck Woman. But the Wolf was her brother. Challenging the Pahkee who rode the spotted pony was both his task and sworn duty.

The baby would go to some Pahkee village and there be reared as a Pahkee. He would probably be adopted by some family who had lost a son to the Shoshones.

The Wolf arose and stalked over to the edge of the butte to look down. The Pahkees had made their camp about two hundred yards away from the base of the butte. An insulting yell arose from them when they saw the Wolf. The horses were picketed, but the warrior who had ridden the spotted horse walked a little way toward the butte and with shouted contempt dared the Wolf to come down. For a bit the Wolf stood silently—Pahkee arrows would not carry this far—and turned to survey his own camp.

The Shoshones were in no danger—now. They had meal and buffalo meat in plenty, and the Pahkees could not storm the butte. But in the buffalo-stomach water bags there was only water enough for three days at the most. Then they would soon have to surrender. The men would be tortured, the women sold as slaves, or—if they were lucky—the younger and more attractive ones would be taken as wives by the Pahkees, and the children would be inducted into the Pahkee tribe.

The Wolf stalked over to stand in front of the warriors, who ignored him by staring stonily ahead. The Wolf's eyes sought Running Antelope, next to himself the strongest warrior present. Slowly and with immense dignity Running Antelope raised his head to look contemptuously at him. The Wolf spoke quietly.

"We will hold a council."

"By what right does a coward summon a council?"

"By this right!"

The Wolf stooped swiftly, snatched up the fine axe that lay beside Running Antelope, and held it threateningly over him. Some of the scorn in Running Antelope's eyes gave way to respect for The Wolf's audacity.

"Do you think anything you may do in council will atone for what you failed to do in battle?" Running Antelope asked. "Do you think any words you may utter will speak as loudly as the deeds you did not do when Duck Woman was stricken down and her child taken captive?"

"At the present time I am not concerned with myself or my own honor," the Wolf said. "I am worried about the safety of the people I brought here. If we sit and do nothing the Pahkees will have us as soon as our water is gone."

A chorus of grunts arose from the warriors. They arose, and brushed past the Wolf toward the two men watching at the head of the trail—all warriors must be included in the council.

The Wolf stood a moment and fell in behind them. But he swerved from the line of march to approach the women. He bent over his wife, White Doe, and said, "Build a lodge."

WHEN the Wolf got to the head of the trail, Running Antelope was speaking. The Wolf caught the end of his speech.

"—are we warriors or cowards? I say that we can go down and fight the Pahkees. If we win it will be a glorious victory. If we lose, our names will be forever honored as men who dared. What do you say, brothers? Are we to remain here and let the Pahkees conquer us with no fight? Or are we going to conduct ourselves as warriors should?"

The assembled warriors leaped to their feet, brandishing axes and bows.

"Fight!" they chanted. "Let us go down and fight!"

From where he had been standing, almost unnoticed, on the outskirts of the council, the Wolf stepped up beside Running Antelope. A sullen murmur arose, but quieted when the Wolf started to speak.

"Let no one think Running Antelope a coward. But also let no one think him anything but a fool. He knows, and every warrior here knows, that an attack on the Pahkees is madness. All of us would be killed. Still, were we warriors alone, I too would favor such an attack. But we are not warriors alone. We are the guardians of women and children of our tribe.

"You, Black Water, have a nine year old son over there. Already he is an excellent horseman, and has killed buffalo. He promises to be a mighty warrior. What flavor will your honored name have when you look down from the Spirit Land and see that boy riding with the Pahkees against his own flesh and blood? You, Owl, have a daughter who some day will be the wife of a chief. What will the fact that you rode into battle against hopeless odds mean when you see

her the plaything of Pahkee youths? There is not one of us, including Running Antelope, who will not be delivering our own flesh and blood into Pahkee hands after we have died in battle. Is that what we want? Does that befit Shoshones? Or does it more befit us to outwit these dogs who think they have us trapped?"

There was a moment of silence. Running Antelope broke it.

"And does the Wolf have any suggestions as to how we are to do that?"

"I do. For years these Pahkees have raided our villages, killed our men and captured our women and children. But they never attack unless they outnumber us. We can both escape from here and avenge some of their previous raids. The Pahkee country is three days' ride to the south. One day's ride west is one of our villages with forty warriors. If we send a person to that village we can bring those warriors here and kill all the Pahkees. Or, if they take warning and escape, we can still run them down because, except for the spotted horse, all our horses are fleeter than theirs."

The Wolf stepped back and Running Antelope took his place.

"We condemned the Wolf because he did not avenge Duck Woman," he said seriously. "Now we know that it is not his fault—his mind was wandering. Does he not know that a single warrior could not even get to the bottom of this cliff before all the Pahkees would be on him and strike him down? Does he not realize that one warrior could not live for the space of ten heartbeats with all the Pahkees against him?"

"I know that," the Wolf said. "But we will not send a warrior. We will send a woman."

"Aye." Anger flared in Running Antelope's eyes and his words dripped contempt. "Let a woman do our work! Watch another woman killed before our eyes so that we may have one more insult to atone for when we face the Manitou!"

The Wolf gripped the axe in his hand until his nails bit deep into the palm.

"A woman will get through!" he said fiercely. "My plan will work. But even if it should fail, you have my word of honor that I myself will kill or be killed by the Pahkee who killed Duck Woman. Then all our souls will be clean. Mine is the only good plan. I'm going to enforce it with the strength of my arm. Anyone who disagrees may fight me now. If he kills me, let him assume the leadership. If he can not kill me, I am still chief!"

There was muttering among the warriors. The Wolf waited calmly, knowing that he could force his way. Owl rose and gestured for silence.

"The Wolf will try his plan. But he will answer to us for it. If it fails, he will not get a chance to fight the Pahkee. He will die here at the hands of his fellow-warriors."

The Wolf turned back toward the women, who had erected a buffalo skin lodge. He stopped by White Doe.

"Bring the small black horse with the black tail and come into the lodge," he ordered.

SAVE for the Wolf, who remained in the lodge, and the two warriors who stayed to guard the head of the trail, the assembled Shoshones stood together to watch White Doe ride the black pony out of the lodge. The Pony's black tail had been clipped short, no doubt to make some medicine the Wolf thought best. White Doe sat astride the saddle, the blanket falling over the pony's flanks to cover her feet, and pulled up to conceal her face so that only her glistening black hair showed.

Running Antelope glanced threateningly at the lodge, and took one step as though to follow the black pony. But he drew back. It was the Wolf's business, and the Wolf would pay the penalty if it failed.

The two guards at the head of the trail stepped aside to let the pony pass, and the Shoshones crowded to the edge of the butte to look down. There was no sound from them, only tense breathlessness. Even the youngest child, a baby four months old, did not cry but seemed to sense the import of the moment.

Then the Pahkees saw the pony and its rider and a derisive howl arose. Running Antelope and Owl strung their bows, walked nervously toward their

horses, and came back to the edge of the butte. It was as though some potent magnetic force drew them there, as though they could not leave.

Keeping the pony at an easy trot, White Doe rode halfway down the trail. Another gust of laughter came from the Pahkees. The warrior who rode the spotted horse swung to the saddle.

The black pony came to the bottom of the butte, and White Doe kicked him into a gallop as she swung out on a course that would take her straight out from the butte and quartering past the Pahkees. The Pahkees were silent now. Courage, even in a woman, could be respected. The warrior on the spotted horse—the squaw killer—left his companions and thundered down on the galloping black pony.

A groan of despair arose from the watching Shoshones. The pony was one of the slowest horses. If the Wolf had mounted her on one of the fleet animals, White Doe might have a chance.

Now she had none. The great spotted horse was closing the distance between them, gaining three feet on the black pony for every ten feet they ran.

The Pahkee raised a mace, began to chant his war song—which was another distinct honor for a woman. The spotted horse closed the distance between himself and the black pony to fifteen feet and the Pahkee poised his mace for the kill.

Suddenly the blanket fell from the black pony's rider to reveal, not White Doe, but the supple, muscular length of the Wolf!

The Shoshones yelled hysterical encouragement while the startled Pahkees leaped to their horses. The Wolf waited, gave the spotted horse's rider ample time to see that he faced a warrior instead of a woman. They came together, and the Pahkee swung his mace. The Wolf ducked beneath it to come up unharmed. Moving almost lazily, the Wolf's axe arm rose and fell. The Pahkee fell to the ground and the Wolf was on the spotted horse—the fleetest horse the Pahkees had. On top of the butte, Running Antelope gasped. Then—

"You did not really think that the Wolf would let Duck Woman go unavenged?"

As one the Shoshones turned White Doe, the pride she felt flashing from her black eyes, stood in front of the lodge. Her blanket gone, she was dressed only in white buckskins. She spoke again.

"The Wolf bade me stay hidden so that no word or gesture from any of you might betray to the Pahkees that a warrior instead of a woman was riding that horse.

"He dressed himself in my blanket, and wrapped the horse's tail about his head for hair. The Wolf, my husband, should have another name. He is cunning as a wolf, daring as an eagle, and strong as a grizzly bear."

Running Antelope looked from her down to where the Wolf and his swift horse were only a vanishing cloud of dust in the distance. He looked back, and his voice was very respectful.

"Aye, White Doe. The mightiest warrior of all."

MOCCASINED DEATH

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

In the proud hearts of the Dakota there is but one way for young braves to settle their squaw-feuds; fight; fight hard and savage . . . until one can rise no more.

THE SEVEN COUNCIL fires of the Tenton-Dakota burned in the shadow of the Black Hills; for it was the Moon of Fatness, the season when Natose, the Sun, is highest in the sky and the growing power of the earth is strongest. The tipis of the Ogala, Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, Two-Kettle, Brule, Sans Arc and the Blackfeet were thrown out in a huge circle, the flight of two buffalo arrows across. Away in the centre of the camp stood the skeleton of the Sun Dance lodge, already up and awaiting the actual day of the dance, when it would be quickly enclosed with evergreens—all but the top, which would be left open so that Natose might shine down upon his own.

Hundreds of sleek, wild-eyed ponies had been turned out to graze on the rolling grassland surrounding the camp. They whinnied and kicked their heels high in the air, or pranced stiff-legged in a circle, tails and heads raised high, showing off their wild beauty to the youngsters who romped with them.

Within the painted circle of the tipis the buffalo grass curled close to the ground and from its roots came the rasping song of the grasshopper. All through the encampment forms were moving with a quiet dignity that gave purpose to their movement, and here and there a horseman with the sacred red and yellow symbols of the Auhuminea, the camp-police, painted on his bronzed skin.

In the shade of a tipi Kitsipon, son of the Hunkpapa chief, Thunder Face, stood watching Daybreak Star through the open flap of her father's lodge. He was tall and handsome, but he was young and he had yet to take an enemy's scalp and, therefore, no eagle's feather tipped with horse hair dangled from his glossy head.

He stood watching the girl, his face impassive; while under his fine blanket his heart pounded like a dance drum. It was always so when he looked upon Daybreak Star. The more so now because the shadow of the tipi was growing very long, and there was a tryst to keep down by the river where the black-throated buntings sang and swayed on the reeds.

Now, the shadow reached to his feet, and gradually deepened. Daybreak Star came out of the lodge, skin water bag in hand. She stood for a moment, tall and slender, her braided hair flowing in two glossy streaks over her fringed deerskins. Her eyes found Kitsipon. She smiled, and then took the trail down to the river. Kitsipon waited for a time then followed the girl, his step had the spring of the bow in it, but it was not indecorously hurried.

THE SHADOW of the cottonwoods that fringed the river fell across the Hunkpapa section of the camp. A steep trail led through them down to the sandy bottoms. A barred owl sent his booming call echoing through the woods, and a whip-poor-will scolded like an old woman. Kitsipon quickened his pace as he passed from sight of the camp. But scarcely had he entered the darkening woods when a horse blew loudly through its nostrils, then suddenly a tall figure stepped out of the bush, and came to a stand on the trail before him.

A swift flame of anger came into Kitsipon's eyes as he recognized Ingrona, son of the Hukpapa shaman, Long Ghost. Ingrona spoke.

"There is a thing that troubles my mind. I want to talk to you about this thing."

"How," said Kitsipon, and looked straight into the other's eyes.

Crouching, Kitsipon met the charge. In the next instant Ingrona went sailing over his shoulder.

"For a long time I have thought about this thing. My heart is heavy with it."

"Ho!" Kitsipon's eyes flashed. "Now, is not the time to talk of this thing that troubles your mind, Ingrona," he said. "Come to my father's lodge tonight. We will talk then." He made as if to move down the trail, but Ingrona quickly stepped into his path, and confronted him again.

"We talk now," he said, and folded his arms across his deep chest.

Kitsipon stood utterly motionless, looking deeply into the other's eyes. He was a two-feather man, this Ingrona, and he had the savage, alert look of his namesake, the panther. He always wore the finest buckskins, and under his blanket he carried a long knife. He was older than Kitsipon by three summers. As far back as Kitsipon could remember the shaman's son had always been standing in his path. It was strange, but always he seemed not to want a thing until Kitsipon reached out his hand to grasp it. It had been so since childhood, and this had made them strong rivals at every turn. And now, it seemed, they were to be rivals in love; for this was no chance meeting, the scowl on Ingrona's face told Kitsipon that.

"What is this thing that troubles your mind?" he asked.

"Last night my father spoke of this thing. He said: 'We must think of a woman for you. It is time you were thinking of a woman, my son. I have spoken to Iron Robe, the father of Daybreak Star, for you.'"

Kitsipon felt his face getting hot.

"This is the thing I came to talk of," Ingrona went on. "While my father talks with Iron Robe it is not a good thing for you to talk with Daybreak Star. I have spoken."

Kitsipon's attention was drawn down the trail. Daybreak Star was coming back. When she saw the two young men standing there, glowering at each other, she came to a stand; then put her hand over her mouth and sped past them, as swift as a shadow over the grass.

Kitsipon looked steadily at Ingrona for some time; then he said: "It is not a good thing that your father has done. I have put my blanket around Daybreak Star. All the people have seen this. It is known that I will take her—"

"Ho!" Ingrona's teeth showed in a derisive grin. "You are not a man yet. When you put your blanket around a girl you play at love as boys play at war. The people know this, I think."

"Cante sica!" The words came hissing from between Kitsipon's clenched teeth. At the same time he leaped back, letting his blanket fall to the ground.

"I am man enough to split your heart!" he said, and drew his knife.

Ingrona tossed aside his blanket. Steel flashed as he crouched, the fingers of his left hand touching the ground. There was a moment of silence, in which their eyes locked as each sought to measure the strength of the other's resolution. In this silent duel Ingrona's gaze was the first to fall away.

THE YOUTH that confronted him was a boy in years, but he had a man's body, and there was no fear in his steady, unwinking stare. Ingrona's eyes became sly, and flicked around like a snake's tongue. And then Kitsipon sprang at him.

But Ingrona was too quick for him. He leaped aside and his long knife ripped through Kitsipon's buckskin shirt but did not draw blood. Kitsipon whirled to attack again. But just then hoof beats sounded on the trail. Out of the tail of his eye Kitsipon saw his father galloping toward them, followed by two of the camp-police. Feathers fluttered from the ceremonial pipe the old chief carried in his hand. He rode his pony between the combatants.

"A hu ustan!" he shouted, and waved the pipe over his son's head. Gritting his teeth Kitsipon sheathed his knife and stood silent. Thunder Face dropped from his pony, and the look he gave his son was as black as the thunder cloud.

"It is well," he said bitingly, "that we have girls to watch our young men. When the son of a Hunkpapa chief would shed the blood of his own at this holy time, it is well indeed, I think."

Kitsipon looked down at the ground and muttered: "He called me a boy, my father."

"Ho, did he challenge your war record, my son?"

Ingrona made an ugly sound in his throat, then: "He has taken a few Crow

ponies," he said. "Is that a record a man would boast of?"

The chief turned and looked at him steadily for a moment, then he said quietly: "Draw your knife, my son. Now, Ingrona, if you wish to call my son a coward, come forward and touch the point of his knife."

"Ho, ho!" approved the two mounted braves, and turned expectant eyes upon the shaman's son. But now Ingrona looked down at the ground.

"I do not wish to shed blood at this holy time," he said.

"There are many days in the year," the chief told him.

"I will not touch his knife point now," said Ingrona sullenly.

The chief's smile came and went. Just for a moment it softened his deeply grooved face. His mouth relaxed and a gleam of humor changed his eyes. It was a fleeting glimpse of the man under his cold, stern exterior, and in a moment his expression became hard again.

"You both speak with forked tongues, I think," he said. "It is not your honor you would defend like men. There is nothing in your heads but girls. Our people do not fight over girl with knives. Tonight I will talk of this thing in council with the Scalp Shirt Men. Go now. I have spoken."

II

THE MOON CAME up out of the plains and made a ghost world of the camp. The tipis were silhouetted by the fires that burned within, and the shadows of their occupants danced around them like crazy spirits from the nether world. Wolves, drawn by the scent of the camp, howled out in the hills. The dogs slinked to the shelter of the lodges, or stood, with the hair standing along their backs, answering the challenge of the plains in low, gruff yelps—they could not bark, there was too much wolf in them for that.

Presently, the voice of Miteywin, the big, medicine drum, spoke to the night. Then the camp-crier came shouting through the camp, calling the Scalp Shirt Men to the council lodge.

Kitsipon stood outside his father's lodge, looking out toward the hills. His mother sat hunched over the lodge fire, only her eyes showing above the edge of her blanket. She had borne four sons; but three had died long ago, and her heart was full of fear for the one that was left to her. She kept saying over and over again:

"I do not know about this thing. Will there be trouble, my son?"

Kitsipon went into the lodge and sat cross-legged before the fire. "When the council is over we will know, my mother."

"They talk and talk!" said the mother. "I will tell your father to give ponies to Long Ghost, then this trouble will be no more."

He reproved her sternly. "I give no ponies to Long Ghost, or his son. May I never set foot in another snow if I do that!" He put more wood on the fire. It crackled and flared, pushed back the shadows and showed the clean, proud lines of his young face. Looking at him the mother's eyes lost their clouded look.

"It was a bad thought," she said softly. "Unworthy of the mother of a chief. It has passed into the shadows, my son."

Kitsipon smiled, then stretched out on his skin pallet between the fire and the door of the lodge. As he lay there his mind fondled the hope that the council of chiefs would forget his youth and grant him the warrior's right to settle his quarrel with Ingrona in some trial of strength and skill.

His father's light step awakened him, and he sprang to his feet instantly alert.

"Tomorrow, at sunrise, you wrestle with Ingrona," the old man answered the unspoken question in his eyes.

Kitsipon's eyes shone in the darkness. "It is good. I thank my father." he said.

The chief moved into a beam of moonlight. It showed the wry smile that came to his lips as he said: "If you are thrown, we leave this camp on foot, my son. Long Ghost is angry. He has wagered many ponies."

"The Crows have plenty ponies, my father," said Kitsipon absently.

"Ho!" The old man swung around to face him, then added sharply: "You lose, and you lose Daybreak Star. I have spoken!"

"How!" gasped Kitsipon.

"Crows got plenty girl, too!" said the

old man with a dry chuckle, and went to his bed.

Like a whisper in the night the decision of the Scalp Shirt Men had passed from tipi to tipi, and the whole encampment was astir before Natose shot his flaming arrows skyward. Then Miteywin shattered the crystal silence of hills into fragments, and there was a general movement toward the lodge of Sounding Sky, the head chief of the Dakota clans. The camp-police rode yipping through the throng; then rode slowly in a circle, marking out the ground that was to be kept clear for the wrestling.

Around them the promiscuous encampment gathered, and they were so many that they made a loud, rustling sound like a strong wind in the cottonwoods in the Moon of Falling Leaves. Stripped to their breech-cloths Kitsipon and Ingrona came into the center of the ring, and came to a stand, facing each other across the width of a scarlet blanket that had been spread on the ground. Their bodies had been freshly rubbed with bear's grease, but they wore no paint; for, from his high seat in the arch of the sky, Wankan Tanka looks into the hearts of his children when they ask for judgement, and there is no medicine to make him blind.

AS THE SUN came out of the earth the tomtoms began to throb, and the medicine men shook their rattles of buffalo dewclaws. Then they dashed into the centre of the ring and stamped around the two contestants, chanting the traditional song of invocation. The drums stopped. The medicine men retired, and all eyes came to focus on the two young men facing each other. Men whispered together, debating the quality of the pair.

Of the same height, narrow-hipped, deep of chest and broad of shoulder, to the eye they seemed to be evenly matched. A quiver of excitement ran through the people, and the murmur of their voices rose like a wind as wagers were made—a blanket against two blankets, a pony against two ponies. The odds were against Kitsipon because he had no eagle feather to adorn his hair.

Then Sounding Sky stepped out into the sunlight and clamor. The voices of men, women and children blended in a shout of acclaim:

"Hie—yah-h-h-ha!"

The war-chief lifted his feathered staff for silence. Not yet an old man, he made a splendid figure in full, ceremonial dress. His buckskin shirt was fringed with human hair, and the tail feathers of his war-bonnet brushed the ground. Without visible effort he spoke in a deep, powerful voice that carried far over the heads of the people and seemed to come from above. Always he spoke wisely, and the people loved to listen to him.

"My brothers," the chief's voice rang out, "at this holy time the Dakota purify their hearts. At this season the young ones do as they please. The mother does not scold, the father does not strike the laggard son with his bow, because there must be no anger in our hearts at this holy time." He paused, and the medicine men chanted in choruses:

"It is so! It is so, indeed!" Then as silence came again, Sounding Sky went on:

"Yonder you see a blanket between two of our young men. It is there because they would have shed blood, not in sacrifice as is meet at this holy time, but in enmity. Let it be known everywhere that they want the same woman. Let it be known everywhere that their hearts are bad because of this. It is a bad thing, my brothers. It is a trouble upon all of us. The Sun Dance cannot go forward until this thing is settled.

"While you slept the Scalp Shirt Men talked of this thing. Now, you Dakota, I speak for your chiefs. Let the young men fight until one can fight no more. To the woman, Daybreak Star, I say this: The daughters of the Dakota are free to chose their own men. But this I say to her also: Wankan Tanka will show her which is the better man. I have spoken."

A great shout went up from the people, and quickly died as Sounding Sky raised his staff and let it fall to his side. At the signal one of the horsemen dug his heels into the belly of his pony. He dashed across the ring, swooped down to pick up the blanket, came up whirling it about his head, and gave tongue to the Dakota war-cry:

"Hie—yah-h-h-h—yeep, yeep!"

The dust he had kicked up in his passing

was still rising when Kitsipon and Ingrona sprang at each other. They came together, chest to chest with legs and arms wide-spread, hands locked palm to palm. As a clean trial of strength it was beautiful to watch. Their powerful thigh and back muscles knotted, strained and quivered. But not an inch of ground was yielded, and Ingrona knew that he had met his equal, that he could not win by strength alone.

They broke and circled, as light-footed as a pair of catamounts. Then suddenly Kitsipon rushed in and wound his arms around Ingrona's waist. The people shouted as they saw the shaman's son lifted shoulder high. But Ingrona's body writhed and twisted like a snake, and Kitsipon could not retain his hold long enough to complete the throw.

They broke and circled again. Near defeat had shaken Ingrona's nerve, his mouth was ugly, his throat snarling. Then, suddenly, he bounded forward and kicked Kitsipon in the groin. As Kitsipon doubled up and rolled on the ground in agony the women scolded Ingrona shrilly.

In such a contest as this no hold or blow was banned, but in the proud hearts of the Dakota there was no place for the man who stooped to win by a mean blow or trick. The young men of the Ogala and other clans cried out: "Shame!" And the Hunkpapa braves, feeling the sting of it, jeered Ingrona and shouted at Kitsipon:

"Akakimat, akakimat! Stay with it! Up, Kitsipon—up!"

INGRONA advanced upon them, shouting and gesticulating, claiming that his man was down, the fight won, but the more he protested the louder they jeered him. Then a great shout went up as Kitsipon got to his feet, his face twisted with pain. The partiality of the people infuriated Ingrona, and with a chocking cry he rushed at Kitsipon. Crouching, Kitsipon met his charge, and in the next moment Ingrona went flying over his shoulder to fall with a sickening thud.

"Good! Good!" roared the braves. "Up Ingrona! Stay with it!"

But Ingrona did not move. In the sudden, tense silence that followed Kitsipon felt a cold chill run down his spine. The women were staring at the still form with their hands held over their mouths. Then someone shouted:

"He is dead!" The people came surging from all sides of the ring, only to be pushed back by the camp-police who came riding to clear a path for Sounding Sky and the medicine men.

For a long time Ingrona was like a man dead. When at last he sat up groaning, it was seen that his right arm was broken, the bone sticking out through the torn and bloody muscles of his forearm. Long Ghost, the shaman, gaunt and hollow-cheeked, got up from his knees and turned blazing eyes upon Kitsipon.

"You have done a bad thing," he said. "There will be trouble about this thing. When my son is well he will settle this thing."

"Always you chatter like crow in the summer time," Sounding Sky's deep voice interposed. "Like crow there is nothing in your head. If your heart is bad it will be good for you to leave camp."

Long Ghost's black eyes narrowed to slits and he would have made answer but for the grunts of approval that sounded all around him. By fraud and trickery he had gained much influence among the Hunkpapa, and he was too crafty to be drawn into an open quarrel with Sounding Sky. The head chief raised his voice:

"This thing is finished. It will be good for all to forget about it."

As the crowd broke up into small groups two of the camp-police lifted Ingrona to carry him to his father's lodge. Sounding Sky said to Long Ghost:

"I will send Pawnee Captive to your lodge. She knows much. She will give your son strong medicine. He will soon be well."

Long Ghost only grunted and strode away.

The day was very hot and Watinyan, God of thunder, growled like a bear behind the hills. Before all the people could gain the shelter of their lodges a sudden storm burst upon the camp with a startling display of lightning. Rain swept across the open prairie. The angry roar of Watinyan was in the wind and the beating of his wings flattened many tipis. The people drew their blankets over their heads, and children clung together to withstand the fury of his passing.

Just before sunset the sky cleared. The

smell of the prairies was sweet after the rain. The voice of the meadow-lark trilled, and the women laughed and chattered as they repaired the damage done to the camp. Kitsipon was eating with his father and mother when he heard the camp-crier calling his name through the camp.

"The braves of the Horn Society ask Kitsipon to visit them tonight!" he shouted. "The Horn Men ask Kitsipon to drink paezhuta sapa, the black, coffee medicine with them!"

Thunder Face grunted, and looked at his son with a gleam of pride in his eyes. The Horn Society of the Blackfeet was the most famous among the Dakota. A great honor, indeed, for a young man who had no wounds to show to be invited to drink paezhuta sapa with them!

"My son," he said, "you are no longer a boy. They will ask you to join a war-party, I think."

Kitsipon's heart grew big. Soon he would have an eagle's feather, perhaps two like Ingrona. He felt good, and he thought kindly of Ingrona, sick in his father's lodge. He said "I will give Ingrona my best pony. My new leggins and deerskin shirt, these I will give him also."

"Hank-ha," protested his mother. "I made them as soft as the down of a bird. Give him something else, my son."

"He must give like the son of a chief," the father reproved her. "It is good, old woman. The people will know that there is no evil in his heart."

Some time later Kitsipon came to a stand before the open lodge of Long Ghost. Ingrona lay on his skin bed at the back of the tipi. His mother and Pawnee Captive were seated before the fire.

"I bring this pony and these deerskins," said Kitsipon, "to show that there is no anger in my heart."

"My son sleeps," the mother answered without looking up. "He does not want your horse."

"Wake him, woman," said Kitsipon firmly. "I will make talk with him."

The mother's eyes met his in a wide, dark stare; then she looked at Pawnee Captive, and Pawnee Captive answered for her:

"My medicine is strong. He will not wake until the sun rises again."

Whenever Kitsipon looked into the dark, handsome face of Pawnee Captive he got a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach. She was the woman of One Arrow, an Ogala brave, who had captured her in a raid many moons ago. She could do things that the Dakota women could not do. She carried her babe in a basket woven of grass. She made cooking pots of water and earth, and brewed strong medicine in them. People looked askance at her, and many said that she was a witch. Kitsipon was sure of it. Under her steady gaze he had the feeling that she was looking clean through him. He shifted his position uneasily.

"I will leave the pony and the deerskins," he said, and moved off with haste.

III

AS HE CROSSED the campus heading for the skin-covered tipis of the Blackfeet, a scout came riding furiously into the camp from the hills and shouting at his voice: "Sapos! Sapos!" He flung himself from his sweating pony and ran into Sounding Sky's lodge.

"Sapos! Sapos!" His cry echoed by many tongues, and in a moment the whole camp was seething with excitement as the people came running from all directions, and the camp-crier went galloping from clan to clan, calling the Scalp Shirt Men to council. The tremolo of the women filled the camp as the braves gathered outside the big, council lodge, silent but with eyes aglow in anticipation of battle. Kitsipon stood among them, his heart beating high; for it was soon known that the scout had come upon the trace of Crows, skulking in the hills. Would his father let him ride with the war-party? This was the only thought in Kitsipon's head.

He was not kept in doubt long. Sounding Sky came out of the lodge, followed by the six Scalp Shirt Men. A great shout went up as the head chief lifted his feathered staff high above his head. Kitsipon's eyes sought his father's, silently pleading. The old man inclined his head, and smiled to see his son whirl and dash across the campus, as light as smoke.

All the young braves were eager to strike the Crow, the traditional foe, but none so eager as Kitsipon. This was his day. Tonight he would bring a Crow

scalp to the lodge of the Horn Society, or never set foot in another snow! In the wild dash for the horses he was among the first who flung themselves upon their ponies.

Just as the sun touched the rim of the hills the Dakota braves paraded around the camp. Twice they circled it, then Sounding Sky lifted his war-lance and with a long-drawn "Hie-yah-h-h-h—yeep, yeep!" the Panthers of the Plains dashed out of the camp.

They rode pell-mell in a cloud of dust, but as they neared the hills the mass broke up into small parties to scour the hills for sign of the enemy. Kitsipon streaked away to the south. In his party were White Dog, a renowned Hunkpapa brave, Crow Shoe and Thunder Horn. At the sound of hoof geats behind Kitsipon looked back, and was surprised to see Long Ghost riding hard to catch up with them. Soon the shaman was riding beside him.

They moved down into the ravines and up the hills. They rode hard, without sign of the enemy, until darkness overtook them on the bank of a creek that came spilling out of a ravine. Here Thunder Horn, their leader, decided to camp for the night.

Kitsipon and his companions planted poles of willow shoots in the ground in a circle, covering them with saddle blankets all around. In the centre of this windbreak they built their fire. They ate a meal of pemmican in silence, and then Long Ghost brewed some Paezhuta sapa, for which he had traded with the Blackfeet, he said. When the others had drunk he refilled the horn and passed it to Kitsipon and said:

"My son accepts your gifts. Let there be no evil between us."

"That is good, friend," said Kitspon, and drank and smacked his lips over the strong, aromatic liquid.

Because he was the youngest, he was given the first watch. And because this was his first war-party and he was anxious to show his keeness, he was not content to sit by the fire and keep his eyes and ears open while his companions slept, but went out to prowl around the windbreak like a wolf.

The moon was caught between two threatening clouds, and it was very dark. The hobbled horses were moving about with short jumps as they grazed. Occasionally one of them sneezed, and he started and tightened his grip of the stock of his flintlock. A barred owl sent his booming note into the night from a nearby tree, and another answered him from the creek.

He came to a stand in the darkness. A queer, sick feeling had come into his stomach. He felt that he would like to sit down for a while. The quiet of the camp and the sighing of the wind gave rise to a strange feeling of "goneness" that seemed suddenly to flood his body. He began to shiver, and drew his blanket tightly about him. Through a slit in the windbreak he could see the glow of the fire, and it grew larger, then smaller, and then faded into a mist. This frightened him. He thought that he was about to fall asleep. He started to get up, and then fell on his face.

He awoke to all the sudden blackness of the night with shouts and shots ringing in his ears. He started to his feet, only to fall back groaning as the earth seemed to lift under his feet and turn up side down. Then someone threw water into his face, and he sat up to stare stupidly into the furious eyes of Thunder Horn.

"Up woman!" the leader shouted at him, and kicked him in the ribs as Long Ghost and Crow Shoe came up to scowl down at him.

"The Crow have stolen our horses!" Thunder Horn raved. "White Dog ran after them, and they killed him. Do you hear, Nastinchala?"

Kitsipon winced at the insult. He got to his feet and stood swaying. Thunder Horn's face blurred and became two faces, distorted with rage.

"No man calls me Rabbit Woman," Kitsipon muttered.

Thunder Horn spat at him, and then struck him a hard blow in the face. Kitsipon's legs would not support his weight. He sat down, and everything whirled around him.

THUNDER HORN was working himself up into a frenzy. "I am a great warrior," he fumed. "But this woman has disgraced me. He has disgraced us all, my brothers! What will the people say about this thing? The Ogala will mock

us. The Blackfeet will mock us. They will ask: 'Who are these braves who went on the warpath and came back walking?' They will tell it everywhere." He choked in his rage and drew his knife.

And he would have plunged it into Kitsipon's heart then and there if Long Ghost had not pushed him back.

The shaman said firmly, "There is no thinking in you, Thunder Horn. We take him back to camp. The Scalp Shirt Men will talk of this thing. If we do this no one will blame us, I think."

"He speaks good words, brother," said Crow Shoe.

Thunder Horn sheathed his knife and uttered a grunt of assent. Then, with Long Ghost to help him, he jerked Kitsipon to his feet. Without waiting for daylight they set out for the camp.

Kitsipon sat in his father's lodge, hunched up in his blanket, and his heart was like a cold stone in his breast. His head was clear now. He knew that he had disgraced himself, his father and his people. How, or why, this thing had happened to him he could not tell. It had happened, and his spirit was dead within him. When his mother spoke to him he looked at her with the blank stare of a blind man, and made no answer. And when the camp-crier came to call him to the council of the Scalp Shirt Men, he obeyed the summons like a sleep-walker.

The people had all gathered before the council lodge from which the covering had been rolled back so that the chiefs and the medicine men sat within a covered half-circle in plain view of all. A way was opened for Kitsipon. He heard voices, but they were like whispering. He saw faces, but they were like shadows. As he came to a stand Long Ghost rose to speak. His hand came from under his blanket, and his finger pointed at the Hunkpapa chief, and there was venom in his look.

"My brothers," he said, "all the chiefs have spoken about this thing, but Thunder Face is silent. He sits like rabbit. Like rabbit he says nothing."

He sat down, and the Hunkpapa chief rose. "My brothers," the old man said in a voice that shook, "I am old. Like old horse, that stands in the shade, I stand in the shadow of this thing. Like old horse, my head is low. My son stands in the shadow of this thing also. But he is not old. I ask him to lift his head, and hear the judgment of the Scalp Shirt Men."

Kitsipon's head came up with a jerk. He answered clearly and firmly: "Th re is no fear in my heart, my father. It is too cold to know fear. I—"

"Ho!" the voice of Long Ghost interrupted him. "Ho, listen to Nastinchala! Listen to the Rabbit—" He stopped talking as Sounding Sky jumped to his feet.

"Always you chatter like crow!" exclaimed the chief. "Our hearts are sore because of this thing that has come upon our brother. But there is no sorrow in your heart, I think." He raised his voice so that all the people could hear:

"I speak for your chiefs. This trouble has come upon our brother Thunder Face because his son drew a knife to shed the blood of one of his own people at this holy time, we think. It will be well for Kitsipon to leave this camp, lest the anger of Wankan Tanka fall upon all of us. The Scalp Shirt Men put this ban upon Kitsipon. Let him leave the camp now, let him not return to his people until twelve moons have passed. Let no man give him food of comfort while this ban is upon him. I have spoken."

A few hours later Kitsipon rode toward the hills. He was riding his pack-horse and leading his father's war-horse, Flying Hawk. The great steel-dust stallion had been his father's parting gift, and there was not a faster horse among the Dakota. His saddle he had made himself, and on it he carried some pemmican, a horn cup and a war-bag containing his dress cloths. He had a four-point, Nor'west blanket and a buffalo robe strapped to the cantle. In his belt, on his left side, he carried his knife in a sheath. His other weapons consisted of his flintlock and his quiver containing his bow and thirty arrows with metal war-heads that he had made from an old frying pan.

He rode into the hills. He did not look back at the camp, but kept going steadily. That was the easiest thing to do, because he didn't know where to go. At the back of his mind there was the idea that the Crows were responsible for his disgrace and banishment, and that he would avenge himself by hunting Crow scalps. He must prove his manhood to himself first, then he

would do a great thing— a brave deed that would be talked of everywhere. Oh yes, he would come back to his people a great warrior. He would throw many Crow scalps at the feet of Sounding Sky, then Daybreak Star's eyes would shine like the stars again for him.

IV

FOR MANY DAYS he wandered in the hills. Like the gray wolf he lurked on the flanks of the moving Crow villages. Like a wolf, he ran down the lone hunter. But he scorned to spring upon his quarry from ambush. He challenged all to battle, and no brave he encountered withstood him for long; for he fought with the fury of the wounded mountain-lion.

By the time the cherries were black, there were six Crow scalps dangling from the barrel of his flintlock. Sometimes, the Crows sent out war-parties to chase him, but always the steel-dust stallion outran their fastest ponies. Often they saw him at night on a butte, silhouetted against the moon, the long mane and tail of his horse flowing like water under the stars; and the steel-blue color of the great stallion blended so completely with the starlit night that it gave him a ghostly aspect.

Soon the Crows came to thinking that he was an evil spirit, haunting the hills and the plains, and they called him *Ghost Horse*. They feared him greatly, and when his long-drawn war-cry came echoing down from a butte, the Crow braves looked down at the ground and dared not answer it.

In the Moon of Falling Leaves Kitsipon left the Crow country. He followed the honking geese southward; for soon the howl of the wolf would echo over the white world of winter, and he knew that he must find some place to winter. He had used up all his powder, and must find a friendly band with whom he could trade his pelts for more.

Besides, he was lonely and sick at heart. At night his father and mother spoke to him in dreams. Even when awake these same images appeared to him, and superimposed themselves on his surroundings, veiling them, creating a perpetual mirage. In the babbling of a creek he heard the laughter of children around the cooking fires; the soft eyes of the deer that fell to his swift arrows reminded him of Daybreak Star, and then he felt so bad that a tightness came into his stomach and he could not eat the flesh.

Day after day he rode, talking to Flying Hawk, his horse. He was sure that the stallion understood him, because he attributed understanding to all creatures; and, if he could not understand their speech it was only because the power lay dormant. He understood them well enough in dreams.

Once he crossed the trail of an Indian village, and he knew it was one of the Dakota clans moving south to winter camp. Which of the seven clans that had gathered for the Sun Dance he could not tell for sure, but he thought it was Sounding Sky's village, because it was a big village—much bigger that the Hunkpapa, and the other clans would be far to the north and east by this time.

He followed the trail until it led him out of the wooded foothills, and drew rein on a high butte. The plain was like a colored blanket dropped from the sky, and tumbleweed rolled along the ground in ungainly bounds. As far as eye could see nothing else moved. It was hard not to follow the trail until he saw the camp. But Wankan Tanka saw all things; and, to atone for his disgrace, he must not seek out, or look upon the face of one of his own people for many moons yet. Slowly he rode back into the hills.

That evening when he was making his way down a draw to his camp site, a wolf came out of the bush and howled at him. It was a huge, black timber wolf, and with the true curiosity of a wolf it watched Kitsipon notch an arrow. But at the twang of the sinew-backed bow it jumped sideways. The arrow missed its shoulder and gouged its flank, and with a yelp it vanished into the bush.

"Go now, my brother," said Kitsipon. "Tomorrow I will follow you. I need your thick fur for the winter."

Accordingly, at daybreak he loaded his pelts on the pack-horse and rode out on the trail of the big wolf. It was easy to follow because it left a track of blood. It led him far over the hills and into a valley. It seemed to be bent on a steady trail due south. Not even the fresh cross tracks of deer swerved it form its purposeful course.

This puzzled Kitsipon because the wolf was not acting like a hunted thing.

He was a pitiless hunter and he kept on tirelessly. He knew that the wolf was tiring and that if it kept to open country he would soon run it down. But the shadows of the trees were long when suddenly he saw the wolf on a naked ridge.

"Ho, ho, my brother!" shouted Kitsipon. "You are tired now. But you are a brave warrior. You will stand and fight now!"

LEAVING the pack-horse, he galloped up the steep slope. But when he got to the top he could see no sign of the wolf. There was no trace of it. It had vanished like smoke. Slowly he began to circle the spot where he had seen it last, looking for a trace of blood. Then his ear, keenly tuned to the voices of the woods, caught a strange sound. He dismounted and stood listening intently. Faintly on the wind the sound came again. He uttered a grunt of astonishment. There was no mistaking what it was. It was the wail of a child.

He jogged down the hill toward a clump of dense bush and trees whence the sound had come. Then he saw a red blanket staked up in a hollow in the bush to form a crude shelter. Under the blanket an Indian woman lay face down on a buffalo robe. She did not stir as he approached. He dropped to his knees and rolled her over, and then jumped to his feet as if something had stung him. It was One Arrow's woman, Pawnee Captive!

She was still breathing but her skin was drawn tightly over her cheek bones. She groaned as he bent over her again. Hunger looked at him from out of her glazed eyes. Her lips moved but no sound came. Then he heard the wail again. It seemed to come from above. He looked up and there hanging high out of reach of prowling animals, he found the child—a baby not more than two years old, snug in its woven basket packed with rabbit skins.

Swiftly he built a big fire and made a camp. Then he snared a rabbit; and, slitting its throat with his knife, pressed the warm blood into the mouth of the hungry infant. Then he did the same for Pawnee Captive. Later, he roasted meat on the end of a stick and fed it to the woman. She ate sparingly, with her strange eyes fastened on his face. Then she asked for the child. He put it into her arms and, without another word, she drew her blanket around it, and sank into a deep sleep.

While she slept he built a large shelter of saplings and covered it with skins. As he worked he thought about the big wolf and its unswerving track, leading straight to Pawnee Captive and her child. There was no doubt in his mind as to what had happened. Near death, Pawnee Captive had sent her spirit forth in the shape of the wolf to bring help, and he cast uneasy glances at the sleeping woman. Once he thought it would be well to leave all his food with her and ride away. But curiosity got the better of his fears.

Two days passed before Pawnee Captive was able, or willing, to utter more than grunts. But on the third day when he came back from a long hunt it was to find his meal ready for him. While he was eating, Pawnee Captive suddenly burst into speech:

"My man, One Arrow, is dead. A big war-party of Crows attacked our camp. Many Ogala braves were killed. It was a big fight. Many Crows died also. It was enough for them. They went away but they took our horses. Sounding Sky led the people south to capture more horses. We saw no buffalo, and soon the kettles were empty. I could not keep up. I came here to die."

Kitsipon scowled. "It is not the way of the Dakota to leave their women to starve."

"I am Pawnee," she answered quietly. "Many say I am evil woman. A witch."

Kitsipon said nothing. After a long pause she went on again:

"A thing troubles my mind. For two days I have kept this thing in my mind because it is a bad thing. Now I want to tell you about this thing."

"How," grunted Kitsipon.

"This thing will make your heart heavy but it is so. After the Crow raid Sounding Sky sent scouts to look for your people to call them to council. They came, but your father's voice was not heard in the council of the Scalp Shirt Men. The shaman, Long Ghost, sat in his place. Now, the Hunkpapa have no ears for the words of Thunder Face. They have ears only

for the words of Long Ghost."

Nothing of what he felt showed on Kitsipon's stern, young face. He stated rather than asked: "Sounding Sky will go on the warpath against the Crows."

"It is so."

"Ho, that is good! The Crows know me." Then he looked at Pawnee Captive and asked: "Can you travel, woman?"

"I am ready," she answered; then: "Ingrona's arm is crooked," she told him. "Long Ghost's heart turned bad toward your father because of this. Now there is another thing in my heart that I do not speak. But a time will come when I will show Kitsipon this thing that is in my heart."

IN THE MORNING he made a travois for the child and they traveled slowly back through the valley. On the following day they came to the spot where Kitsipon had seen the trace of the Ogala village, and for two days they followed the trail across the swale and roll of the plains. All the way they watched closely for warparties, but saw nothing but the slinking coyote and the prairie-chickens that fluttered cackling across their path, and once, in the distance, a cloud of dust that marked the passing of a herd of buffalo.

On the fourth day they saw red hills against the skyline, low and bare. Later, they could see a line of trees that bordered a river—a dark, green blur lying on the brown of the prairie like a snake. Above the trees turky-vultures wheeled, and because they did not settle Kitsipon knew that they were hovering over the refuse of an Indian camp.

As they drew nearer he remembered these hills. Once, long ago, the Hunkpapa had wintered here in a deep valley beyond the river. Carry-the-Kettle-Camp, the women had called it because it was three buffalo arrows from the water. When he could see the blue smoke-haze of the lodge fires he hauled up and said to Pawnee Captive:

"I go no further because of the ban that is on me."

Pawnee Captive slid from the packhorse, took her child from the travois and shouldered the cradle. Then she came to stand before Kitsipon, very straight and very handsome, and there was a soft light in her jet black eyes.

"Where will you go?"

Kitsipon pointed to a spot far up the river. "I camp there tonight," he told her. "I have helped you. Now, you must help me. I will wait until I hear the war drum, then I will ride and leave a trail easy to follow. My trail will lead to the Crow camp. Tell my father of this thing, but speak of it to no other man."

Pawnee Captive laughed softly. "I see what is in your mind," she said. "If a spirit came to your father in a dream and showed him the road to the Crow camp, the people would think that his medicine is strong."

Kitsipon said sternly: "That is not in my mind, woman."

"No matter," said she, with a faint smile. "Your father will have a dream. When I go to his lodge I will give him black-coffee-medicine. Oh yes, he will have a dream!"

Kitsipon started, struck by a sudden thought. "Black-coffee-medicine," he said scowling. "Does it make a man sleep, woman?"

"It will do no harm," she said; then, added quickly: "There is another I will speak to. I will speak to her with a woman's heart. She will wait until Kitsipon comes back to his people, I think. If she wants a man born to be a chief, she will wait." With that she set her face toward the river, leaving Kitsipon to stare after her.

He watched until she faded into the gloom of the trees, thinking that one day he must have plain speech with her, learn about this black-coffee-medicine that made a man sleep and dream. Then he rode up the river, and made camp in a sandy hollow screened by cottonwoods and willows.

It was sometime in the dead of that night that he awoke, startled by the howl of a wolf coming from the opposite bank. The moon had climbed out of the earth and seemed to be entangled in the branches of the cottonwoods. Back in the hills he could hear the subdued beat of a medicine drum. Flying Hawk snorted and stamped as the wolf howled again very close to his camp. He got up and stood with the hair pricking his scalp, half expecting to see the flint-eyes of the big, timber wolf glaring at him from across

the river.

The moon struggled out of the cottonwoods. He moved to the stallion, stroking his silken neck, soothing him. Across the river he thought he saw a black shape slink across an open space. Then Flying Hawk jerked up his head and looked intently upstream, ears forward. Kitsipon looked in the direction indicated.

A long file of Indians was moving silently downstream. They rode with their blankets up to their eyes so that only their eagles' feathers showed. The feathers were red. It was a big Crow war-party.

V

HE BACKED Flying Hawk into the deep shadows and pinched his nostrils to keep him from whinnying. It was a large party for it took a long time for the file to pass his place of concealment. The strength of the party told him at once that it was bent on the destruction of the Ogala and Hunkpapa before Sounding Sky could summon the rest of the Dakota clans. As the last of the braves melted into the shadows, he patted the stallion's neck and said:

"Ho, ho, this is bad for our people, friend! They will not think that the Crows have followed them so far south. It is good that we saw this thing!"

The moon went behind a cloud, and it grew darker. But in his mind he carried a clear picture of the country—the hillside flowing down to the river, the thicket on his left hand that looked like the stiff hair on an angry dog's back. He swung onto Flying Hawk's back, swam the river, then circled the hill in the opposite direction to that taken by the Crow war-party.

He rode slowly and silently for he knew that the Crows would not attack the camp until an hour before dawn when sleep is deepest. Soon he found the path the women had made down to the water, and followed it. The throbbing of tomtoms grew louder. Presently he saw the flickering light of a big fire in the valley. A dance was in progress, and most of the people were gathered in the centre of the camp. He rode quietly in. No man challenged him. The Crows might have done the same, he thought. He spoke to Flying Hawk:

"Ho, we will teach them, my friend!"

Then he touched the stallion's belly with his heels, and thundered into the camp. Straight down upon the dancers he bore, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Sapos! Sapos!"

In a moment panic swept through the camp like fire in the prairie grass. Men raced for their weapons; women caught up their children and ran shrieking on the heels of their men. Sounding Sky's voice rang out above the tumult. Kitsipon saw him standing among a group of elders and medicine men, with his staff held above his head to rally the Ogala and Hunkpapa around him. He pulled Flying Hawk down to the haunches, wheeled, bounded from the saddle and strode up to the chief.

A chorus of exclamations broke out as he approached the group. He saw Long Ghost's gaunt figure bathed in the flickering light of the big fire. The shaman wore the buckskin shirt of a chief, decorated with tassles of human hair. His eyes swept over the group but he could not see his father's face.

"How!" he said, and came to stand before the chief.

Sounding Sky did not return his greeting. Instead he lifted his hand, touched his lips, then his heart and flipped his fingers twice at Kitsipon, and that said as plainly as words. "There is a ban upon you. Stand away from me!"

Kitsipon felt the hot blood rush up into his ears. His eyes flashed, and he said: "War-chief, while you dance the Crows creep up upon your camp. I came to tell you this thing. Now you know it. Do as you will."

"He lies!" Long Ghost's voice accused. "We are far from Crow country. He has seen no Crows. He lies. His heart it not strong enough to live out the ban—"

"Enough!" Sounding Sky raised his hand in a dignified gesture. The braves who had dashed for their weapons were now coming back on the run to form a tight circle around the fire. Sounding Sky waited for the commotion to die around him. As silence came, he said: "My brothers, we have eyes and ears. Let the Auhuminea go out to find the Crow camp."

There was a rustle of movement as the camp-police detached themselves from the

group and vanished into the night.

"Now," said Sounding Sky, "let Kitsipon speak."

Kitsipon drew himself up proudly and told how the timber wolf had led him to Pawnee Captive and her child and how the wolf had wakened him so that he might see the Crow war-party. As he finished one of the scouts came dashing up to report that the Crow camp had been found down by the river. A tense silence fell upon the people, and all eyes were turned upon Sounding Sky. For a long time the war-chief stood with folded arms and bent head. At last he spoke:

"Brothers, this is my counsel." He turned to face the river and lifted both arms, holding them crooked as if to grapple with the enemy. "Let the old men, women and children leave the camp. Then, let the Ogala hide in the woods on my right hand, and let the Hunkpapa hide in the woods on my left hand. When the Crows come they will think that we are asleep in our lodges. They will rush into the camp to kill us. Then—" he paused, looking around at the tense faces of his braves, then brought his hands together with a resounding clap. "Then, my brothers, we will catch them!"

"Agh, agh-good, very good!" Shouts of approval broke out all around him. Again Kitsipon looked for his father's face among the Hunkpapa braves who had gathered around Long Ghost, but he could not find it. His gaze came to focus on Long Ghost. Their eyes met, and the shaman's look was like the glint of a knife blade in the moonlight.

SWIFTLY the camp-police executed his orders. The old men, women and children were herded together. Then Kitsipon saw his father moving off with the old men. The shame of it struck at him like fangs. His eyes darted to Long Ghost, who was leading the Hunkpapa braves to the left side of the valley. It was his father's right to lead the Hunkpapa, and he saw the shaman through a red haze of sudden hate. His hand flew to the hilt of his knife. But even as his leg muscles tightened for a spring the hand of Sounding Sky fell upon his shoulder and spun him around.

"Now is not the time!" said the chief.

Kitsipon threw off his hand, his eyes blazing. Hot words rose shaped in his mind, but he did not utter them. Sounding Sky's gaze was calm, serene. The chief said in a low voice that soothed:

"My heart is sore for my brother Thunder Face. Long Ghost has much mouth but poor counsel. Yet it is for the Hunkpapa to say who they will send to the council of the Scalp Shirt Men. It is the way of the Dakota. Has the son of Thunder Face forgotten this?"

"In my anger I forgot it," said Kitsipon. "But my anger is dead now."

The chief lowered his voice. "Now, I will tell you this: Pawnee Captive came to my lodge and told me a thing that troubles my mind. I do not know about this thing but Long Ghost knows about it. In council I will ask him about this thing. More I cannot tell now." He looked up at the stars, then:

"The Crows will come soon. Let Kitsipon fight with the Ogala, so that he will have no trouble with Long Ghost." And with that he turned away and went to join his braves, already in ambush on the wooded slope.

Time passed very slowly, and it seemed to Kitsipon that he had been crouched beside Sounding Sky for many hours, and there was still no sign of the Crow. The Dakotas' horses had been left to graze, the better to deceive the enemy, and he wondered if the Crows would know Flying Hawk when they ran them off. All around him the Ogala braves lay on their bellies, stripped to their breechcloths, their painted bodies covering the metal of their guns. The night was still except for the spirited chirping of a tree frog. The big fire in the center of the camp blinked like a sleepy, red eye and grew smaller and smaller. The moon sank behind the hills. The stars paled.

Then suddenly a barred owl sent its booming note into the night and was answered by another like an echo. There was a rustle of movement in the bush all around Kitsipon as the Ogala braves rose to a crouching position. The owl hooted again, and then the shrill Crow war-cry reverberated through the valley.

Like wolves upon a fallen deer they swooped into the camp. They came on foot, howling and shooting their guns into

the Dakota tipis; then slashed their way into them with their knives, expecting to surprise and kill the occupants before they could grasp their weapons.

It did not take them long to discover that they had been tricked, and they came rushing out of the tipis to gather around their chief, yapping like dogs around an old woman with meat. Before they had time to recover from the shock of it, Sounding Sky gave tongue to the Dakota war-cry:

"Hie-yah-h-h-h—yeep, yeep!"

This was the signal to shoot. The blackness on both sides of the Crows was rent by gun-flashes. As the echoes of the ragged volley went rolling up the valley, the Dakota threw down their guns, snatched tomahawk and knife from their belts, and rushed down upon the confused Crows, the long-drawn war-cry trailing behind them.

In a moment Kitsipon found himself among the Crows, cutting and slashing. Two braves went down before him. Then a blow from a gun butt stunned him. He dropped to his knees, and the fight surged over and all around him.

When he struggled to his feet he saw that these Crows were not women. Many of them had fallen to the Dakotas' guns, and many more had been slashed to death in the first savage attack. But they had beaten off the attack and now they were gathered around their chief, chanting their death songs, prepared to die with their faces to the enemy. They were outnumbered and hemmed in on all sides, but they had their guns; and, even as Kitsipon looked around for Sounding Sky, they started to shoot. A brave, standing close to Kitsipon, coughed and fell on his face.

UNDER the menace of their guns the Dakota wavered. Many thought of their own guns which they had dropped in the bush, and ran to get them. This thinned the circle about the trapped Crows, and their chief was quick to see the chance this gave them to break through to their horses.

"*Sapos—hoka, hoka!*" his voice rang out above the thudding of the guns. And in the next minute he came bounding straight at Kitsipon, and the Crows came howling on his heels. The suddeness of the onslaught took the Dakotas by surprise. They broke to right and left, and Kitsipon found himself alone, standing in the path of the Crow chief. He stood his ground—he had never shown his back to a Crow.

Like a mountain-lion the Crow chief came at him, swinging his tomahawk. Kitsipon ducked the stroke and sank his knife into the Crow's body; and then they went down together, locked in a death struggle, rolling over and over on the ground while the Crow charge swept over them.

The Crow chief was strong, and he fought like a wounded wolverine. But his strength was fast ebbing from his wound. He gasped as Kitsipon's knife found his body again. Bravely he struggled to his knees and died as Kitsipon's knife plunged into his throat. Deftly Kitsipon took his scalp.

When he got to his feet there was not a man in sight, but far down the valley he could hear the Dakotas howling like a wolf pack on the heels of the fleeing Crows. He started to run. Then a gun shot came so close that the flash blinded him, and the bullet, grazing his left shoulder, spun him around and dropped him to his knees. Before he could regain his feet, Long Ghost came leaping from behind a tipi. The shaman swung his gun above his head. Kitsipon flung himself sideways. The gun butt thudded on the ground close to his head. He bounded to his feet, and kicked the gun from the shaman's hands.

Long Ghost backed away slowly, his face distorted by fear and hate. His small, glinting eyes reminded Kitsipon of the horned desert snake that strikes without coiling, and suddenly he thought of the black-medicine-coffee he'd drunk on his first war-party and knew what had made him sleep.

He leaped forward and plunged his knife into the shaman's left breast. Long Ghost gasped once and died.

Down by the river the Crows made their last stand. And there they died like men—all but a boy who was spared and sent back to his people to tell the story of the fight. Many of the Ogala and Hunkpapa braves had gone on the long ride also, and soon the voice of

Miteywin was sobbing across the prairie.

But the mourning was not long; for there were many Crow scalps to ransom the dead. Wantan Tanka would know his own, and the souls of the departed would not wander over the world like lost spirits.

On the second day the dancers washed the paint from their bodies; the women shook the ashes from their hair and bathed in the river, and there was feasting. Day and night the drums throbbed. In the council lodge, where the sacred bundles were hung, the Dakota warriors gathered to tell the story of their deeds.

All the braves were stripped to their breechcloths. They had their war-wounds freshly painted on their bodies, a red circle for a bullet wound, a red stripe for the gash of a knife or tomahawk. Others had the terrible scars of the Sun Dance reproduced on their chests in bloody detail. There were medicine men, four-feather men, and war-bonnet men, the bravest of the brave.

In the centre of the circle stood Kitsipon, his head unadorned. Standing there he looked serene and calm, but under his folded arms his heart was beating fast, and proudly; for his father sat on the right hand of Sounding Sky, and between the war-chief's crossed legs there was a war-bonnet. It was a beautiful thing, the work of Pawnee Captive and Daybreak Star. There was not another like it in the camp, and it was the envy of all the Dakota women.

Sounding Sky spoke: "Our ears are open, brothers. Let Kitsipon, the son of the Hunkpapa chief, tell his story now."

Like all Indians Kitsipon knew how to tell a good story, and he told it vividly and in pantomine. He uttered the death cry for every Crow scalp he had taken; howled for the big, black timber wolf and wailed lustily for the child of Pawnee Captive. He held his audience spellbound, and whenever he paused for breath their grunts of approval sounded all around him:

"Agh, agh! Waste, waste!"

When he had finished and silence came, Sounding Sky rose to speak:

"My brothers," he said, "you saw this young man stand alone before the Crow charge. You saw a brave man, the Crow chief, die. But there is a thing you did not see. It was the evil in Long Ghost's heart. I will tell you about this thing.

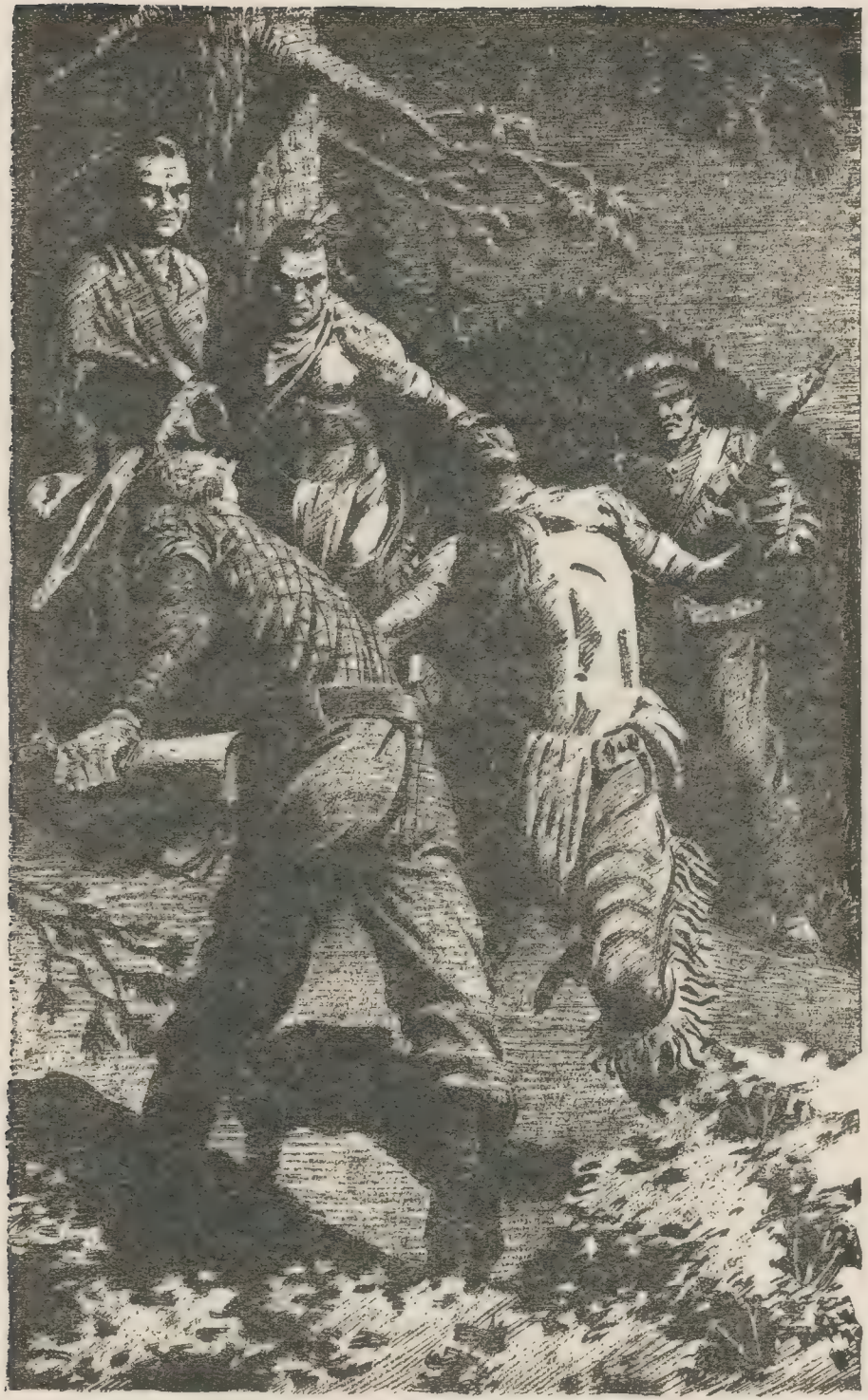
"I sent Pawnee Captive to the lodge of Long Ghost when his son was hurt. I did this because I knew that she would give him strong medicine that would make him sleep and he would not know pain. Some of Pawnee Captive's medicine was stolen. Long Ghost stole the medicine and he gave it to Kitsipon when he was out looking for Crows in the Black Hills."

"It is so! It is so, indeed!" many shouted. "Long Ghost shot at Kitsipon. The women saw this!"

"Good, then it is finished, my brothers! Before you stands a man. He will sit in his father's place one day, I think. Now, I give him this war-bonnet, and I give him his man's name—a name the Crows fear, Ghost Horse. I have spoken."

Kitsipon stepped out into the sunshine in all his glory and with the acclaim of the Dakota warriors still ringing in his ears. He saw Daybreak Star and Pawnee Captive squatted on their heels over a pit filled with red embers, above which was a framework of willow bows holding pieces of meat that sizzled and dripped. He swirled his blanket about him and walked over to them. As his shadow fell across the embers they rose. The girl gave him one thrilling look, then dropped her eyes as became a maiden, but Pawnee Captive looked him up and down boldly.

"Huh!" she approved. "Very good—very handsome." Then with a soft laugh she gave the girl a push toward him. Kitsipon caught the girl within the fold of his blanket: and, with her arm about his waist, they walked slowly toward his father's lodge.



The wounded Cherokee's one last dash for freedom was stifled by the hard-swinging Van Tilgh.

The Eagle of Kuwahi

By C. HALL THOMPSON

On came the greedy suckling pigs; those white men who'd do any wrong for a tiny pebble of yellow gold. With them as silent, wary protectors came the Blue Coats . . . and only Ruhaya and his father Tsahuni, the Cherokee's fearless Eagle of Kuwahi, were prepared for the supreme sacrifice.

SINCE THAT time many moons have set. Many suns have risen through the blue mists of the Great Smokies and the white man has forgotten Tsahuni and his son. In the Valley of Ocona Luftee, the Cherokees wear the white man's clothes and their sons learn lessons in his schools. They till the soil of their farms in the warm mountain coves under Kuwahi Peak and live at peace in their cabins.

Yet, there is a day when the old warriors wear bright Cherokee blankets; they toil up the steep paths, through forests that have not known the spoiler's axe, to the crest where a tall rock stands unchanged by a century of wind and the great rains. There is a night when they sit by the grave of Tsahuni, the Eagle of Kuwahi. And the old men remember. The old men tell again the story of Tsahuni; of his son, Ruhaya, and the year of the Eagle.

That year a shadow darkened the Valley and the Cherokees moved silently in their land. They stood on the hills, staring East to the place of the white man, uneasy because a bright pebble had been found

in the streams of Ocona Luftee, a yellow stone that white men called a nugget. The word had spread like fire in the dry grass of October and now, on the eastern rim of the Cherokee country, camps had sprung up like poisoned mushrooms; strange men with heavy faces and the tools of mining in their packs sat by the campfires and watched the Valley and waited.

The white miners had not crossed the boundary. In years long gone, the White Father had sent a scroll of paper and the old Chiefs had set their marks on it. From that time, the canyons and ridges of the Great Smokies had been the home of the Cherokee. And the whites who wanted the golden stone could only sit now and wait and talk.

Their talk moved west through the pine-stands, sighing like a cold stormwind in the passes of Ocona Luftee. It was said that the old treaty had been broken and, with the cunning of the cougar, white men had tricked a handful of Cherokees into signing a new one; a piece of yellow parchment that gave this land to those who hovered like carrion crows on the boundary; that said the whole Cherokee nation would move far away into the west beyond the mountains.

The old men of the tribe, men like Tsahuni, who had lived long in peace, heard the whispers and did not believe. They smoked by their cabin fires and nursed the good soil of fields that would always be theirs; they said the White Father would never break his word.

But the young men listened. Young braves, like Ruhaya, saw the long columns of soldiers ride over the border and up through the Valley. They watched the flash of sabres and the bluecoated men who came by the thousands to build stockades in the low meadows. And the young men felt the cold stormwind at their backs and their mouths set thin and hard. They frowned at the rifles and cannon and the high fort walls that could be the walls of a prison.

Ruhaya saw the coming of the final column. In the afternoon of that day, he had come far from his father's cabin, high into the reaches of Kuwahi, his bow strung taut and arrows in his quiver, hunting meat for the table. He had come out onto a bench and started down, following the trace of a deer, when he caught the sudden glitter of sun on metal.

He stood very still, then, tall and straight as a young tree, his eyes like the eyes of the golden eagle that nests in the crags, watching the long snake of the column winding through the pass below.

The horsemen came first; stiff in the saddle and armed with heavy rifles, they handled their mounts with care, scanning the shadowed coves. Behind them rolled the guns that spoke with the voice of thunder and could cut down men like cornstalks before a sickle; and, in the rear, the wagons that did not belong to the Army, the wagons driven by men in woolen shirts and dirty breeches, and loaded with mining tools.

Ruhaya's shoulders went rigid. The waiting is over, his mind said. They come now, the vultures, brazenly, with their Army to protect them. They come to lay claim to the land of the Cherokee.

His gaze swung back to the head of the line, picked out the bright bars of the Commanding Officer, then narrowed at the sight of a tall loose figure in fringed buckskin riding side by side with the officer.

"And you, Gentry. Even you turn against us, now."

Ruhaya's voice held a soft, final bitterness. He turned and started down along the shale-scattered path to the Valley.

They saw him coming. They saw him break clear of the trees at the toe of the hill and walk straight and sure into the open. The officer reined in sharply, lifted a gloved hand. A silent order ran down the line. Horses halted, champing at the bit; caissons grumbled to a standstill and, far back, the wagon brakes squealed.

The commanding officer sat quite still in the saddle; a rifle rested across his pommel. The troopers did not move but, slowly, a knot of miners on horseback rode up to the spearhead and drew in behind the officer.

The tall man in buckskin stepped out of the saddle. He stood there, his lean bronze face expressionless, his jaw tendons cord-tight.

THEY watched as Ruhaya advanced at an even, deliberate pace. They watched the wink of arrowbarbs, the fringed leggins and bright neckerchief; the

slide and knot of muscles in the naked torso and the keen dark eyes that never left them. Ruhaya halted a few yards from the spearhead, directly in front of the officer.

The officer was young and sweating. His hands were restless on the gun. Ruhaya saw the faces of the miners, hungry wolf faces and eyes that glittered with the same hard light as the yellow pebbles of the creek. He heard the officer's voice, raw but level.

"Gentry. Ask him what he wants."

The tall man in buckskin didn't speak. He watched Ruhaya steadily and his mouth worked but no sound came. Finally his eyes turned away.

Ruhaya looked at the young officer.

"Say your own words, Captain. I know the tongue of the white man."

An uneasy mutter went down the line; the horses shifted nervously.

The miners exchanged a glance. One of them, a square hog of a man with straw-colored hair and loose sleepy eyelids, edged his roan forward abruptly. Ruhaya did not step back. The square-set man smiled, flicking a weighted quirt against his thigh.

Flatly, Ewen Gentry said, "No more of that, Van Tilgh."

Thick hog-jowls tightened. "Listen, Gentry, I'm not taking orders from . . ."

"All right, Van Tilgh!" The officer's tone was too sharp. More quietly, he said, "I'll handle this."

Ruhaya had not moved. He stood tall in the sun, his eyes probing the Officer's face. The officer cleared his throat.

"You're holding us up. If you have any business . . ."

Ruhaya said evenly, "My people have not asked questions. Perhaps they have been silent too long." His black stare switched to Gentry. "Perhaps they have trusted too much."

The soldiers shifted; saddleleather creaked and light caught fire on restless gunbarrels. Gentry did not meet Ruhaya's stare.

The young officer's mouth was edged with white.

"Ask your questions, Cherokee."

Ruhaya looked at him for a long time. The words came, cool, unhurried.

"A treaty was made. This was said to be the land of my people. Yet, now, there is bad talk in the air. We see the white man's Army ride into Ocona Luftee; we count him to the number of seven thousand and watch while he builds forts with high walls. Tsahuni, my father, has said that the white man will keep his word; we will be left in peace in our land. Yet, the young braves watch. And they wonder."

Van Tilgh laughed thickly. The quirt slapped the palm of his hand.

"It ain't always good to wonder."

Gentry's mouth thinned. But the Cherokee ignored Van Tilgh.

"I ask the question now," he told the officer quietly. "What is the meaning of the stories? Why do the seven thousand come?"

He could see sweatbeads on the pale young face, the twitching of the officer's hands. He could feel the column, silent and waiting, and hear the sharp smack of Van Tilgh's quirt against his boot.

The officer straightened in the saddle. His voice was hard to control. "You have answered your own questions. This is the land of the Cherokee."

Ruhaya didn't blink. "It is not the time to speak riddles."

The officer wet his lips. "I'm telling you. The Army is here for your protection."

Ruhaya stared at him. "Nor is it the time for lies."

The officer sat back as if he had been hit hard across the face.

Through clamped teeth, he said, "Damn it to hell, I tell you . . ."

"You tell me you come to shield my people from men who would steal their land." Ruhaya turned his eyes to the knot of miners. "Yet you bring these into our valley. By your side, like greedy suckling pigs, you bring those who would do any wrong for a pebble of gold. You bring the flesh-eating vultures . . ."

The quirt cut down sharply at an angle, singing in the air like the buzz of a rattler. The weighted butt ripped along Ruhaya's cheek, left a bluewhite welt dotted with flecks of blood.

Gentry snapped, "Van Tilgh!" but the quirt lifted again and the roan wheeled, crowding into Ruhaya. The Cherokee caught at Van Tilgh's thick middle; his arms closed like a metal band. Van Tilgh swore and brought the quirt down hard

and then hands snagged Ruhaya's shoulders, hauling him back away from the roan, pinning his sinewed arms and, harshly, in his ear, Gentry said,

"For God's sake, man! You ain't got a chance!"

He saw it then, the long tier of guns in the hands of cavalrymen; the long row of black muzzles like eyes all trained on his chest. Ruhaya quit struggling.

After a minute, Gentry let go. Ruhaya stood there, breathing hard, watching the twist of a taunting smile in the hard blond stubble of Van Tilgh's face. One of the miners laughed thinly. The guns did not relax. The young officer sat whitelipped, holding the reins too tight.

"I have answered your questions," he said. "Are there any more?"

Ruhaya did not look at him; black quiet eyes fixed on Gentry.

Tonelessly, the Cherokee said, "There are no more."

IT WAS quiet. Horses snorted skittishly. The officer stood in the stirrups and peered down the column. Wheeling, the miners headed back for their wagons. Ruhaya did not move. Neither did Ewen Gentry.

The officer said, "All right, Gentry. We're ready."

The man in buckskin faced Ruhaya. "Go ahead, Captain. I'll catch up."

The officer stared for a second, uncertain, sweating. Then, he swore and lifted his canvas-gauntleted hand.

"Faw-hard!"

The ragged cry echoed down the line. Saddlegear chinked and squealed and the gun-carriages groaned, rolling into motion. The column struck ahead, slow and heavy and implacable. The big guns passed and the wagons. The group of miners on horseback rode by and Van Tilgh spat in the dust close to Ruhaya's moccasin. Somebody laughed. The wagons pitched and rumbled on, kicking gray dust.

The two men stood alone, then, in the tall, late afternoon shadows of the pass. A wind stirred the owl-feather in Ruhaya's black shoulder-long hair. His face was cut stone, his voice sharp as the strike of a bullet against rock.

"And you too ride with the carrion crows."

Gentry did not answer. Dark blood swelled his neck and his lean jaw worked.

"You," Ruhaya said softly. "Gentry, the white scout, the hunter who was the friend of the Cherokee; who ate our food and found favor with our young maidens and shared the goodness of our years as a brother . . ."

Ewen Gentry said, "You're wrong, Ruhaya."

"I have seen with these eyes. I have heard with these ears."

Slowly, Gentry's head moved from side to side. "There are things no man can change."

Their eyes held. A calm, humorless smile bent Ruhaya's lips.

"For more moons than the old ones of my tribe can remember, the Cherokee has held this land. Like the eagle of the crags, our war parties ranged wide and far, even into the place of the whites, and in the day of Aganstata, the great warrior, the Cherokee stood strong against any man who came."

"That day is gone."

Ruhaya's smile faded. "Do not be sure."

"That day is past, Ruhaya. You cannot dream a victory and win it with blowdarts and arrows against rifles and cannon."

Somewhere in the hills a raven croaked and, higher still, a mountain creek rustled over the glimmering stones of its bed. There was no anger in Gentry's face, now; he spoke quietly, in the lilting words of the Cherokee, with the tongue of a friend.

"Hear me, Ruhaya. There is a tide in the land. It is strong as the floodtide of the rivers that drives everything before it —or drowns what stays in its path. A man can build a dam, but the tide is stemmed for only a moment; the water behind the dam grows angrier and stronger. In the end the dam is destroyed. So perhaps it is wiser to go with the tide. Wiser to go into a land where there are no floods and men who want gold."

Gentry drew a deep breath. "The choice is yours to make, Ruhaya. To live in a new country and find peace for your squaws and children. Or to see them die —to drown like stupid oxen in the rising tide."

Ruhaya was silent. Gentry rested a hand on the broad shoulder.

"You understand," he said. "Now you understand."

Black eyes met his, unblinking. Ruhaya did not answer.

Finally, Ewen Gentry turned away and stepped up into the saddle. He looked at the Cherokee. Ruhaya stood motionless as a bronze statue; only his eyes lived and burned.

He saw the spurs prod deep and the pony surge forward. He saw Gentry ride away at an easy lope and, far ahead, the twisting, dusty ribbon of the column. For a long time, he stood there, watching it move, slow and inevitable, driving deeper into the heart of his land.

II

THE SUN was low in the pines and red with the last warmth of day, but across the mountain meadows a cold night wind was rising. It was quiet now. The thunder of horses and caissons had gone away and a bird trilled in the peace of the Great Smokies.

Ruhaya tried not to think. He climbed up through the gathering shadow of coves and gullies, heading for the small farm of his father, moving quick and lithe, with the sure foot of the Cherokee mountaineer.

He passed the cabins of Indians, the fires set deep in the ground, built to honor the gods of his people and never allowed to die. Silent squaws stood in doorways and silent children clung to their skirts. Braves smoked in the cabin shade and only nodded as Ruhaya passed. Their faces were drawn and deep-lined; they stared north to the clearing far below where the lights of the Army stockade blinked like the eyes of a cat that lay in wait.

And the wind in the pines whispered to Ruhaya. The wind cried and said: Better to move with the tide, better to live in another place than to drown in the floods of hate and greed.

Ruhaya walked faster. He tried not to listen. Ewen Gentry was wrong, he told himself. This valley was his home. Here he had heard the songs of his mother and the yarns spun by old warriors at the council fires. In the fields of Ocona Luftee, he had danced the Green Corn Dance and worked with his father to see the stalks reach high and good to the sun. He had laughed and courted the maidens who smiled softly and wore the neckerchiefs of young braves as a token of their favor. And in the shadow of Kuwahi Peak, he had dreamed of a bride and sons and lying, one day, old in years and honor, with his fathers in the Cherokee burying ground.

But the wind still cried with the voice of Ewen Gentry and Ruhaya halted a moment in the still, twilit wood. He breathed deep in the scent of pine stung his nostrils and the air was good in his lungs. The thought of life for his people, even in a strange land, was better than the thought of children crying by the bodies of dead squaws and braves fallen like trampled corn before the fire of cannon and rifles.

He had heard men speak of the land west of the mountains; a dry, hard land, not cool and sweet as the Vallies of Kuwahi; yet, a land open and free to men who would fight to make it live. Perhaps, the wind said, Perhaps there could be a new life for the Cherokee; an end of the flood-tide of whites who stole everything with a smile or a crooked word—or a gun. Perhaps . . .

Ruhaya made a raw sound in his throat and lunged on through the tangled brush. He didn't stop until he reached the cove of his father's farm, saw the patient, reassuring rows of the field; the lighted windows and the shadow of Tsahuni moving slow and steady about the cabin. Ruhaya felt a chill sweat on his back. His bruised jaw ached dully. He crossed through the quiet dusk and stood in the open doorway.

The cabin was warm with the smell of cornmeal gruel that boiled in the pot over the fire. At the tread of moccasins, Tsahuni straightened, still holding the great black ladle in his hand. He was bone-thin now and a frost lay on the mane of long hair. But he was still tall and age had not bent the broad square of his shoulders. Lines of thought and laughter scored the dark face and his eyes were deep with the gentle knowledge of long years of peace, yet still bright and quick to see.

He took a step toward the door. "My son . . ."

Then the quick eyes moved to Ruhaya's

cheek. The old Cherokee's full mouth thinned; there was no other change in his face. Slowly he turned back to the fire. The cornmeal bubbled; he stirred it with patient circles of the ladle. Quietly, he said,

"You did not cross the track of the deer."

Ruhaya didn't speak. He moved into the firelight, watching his father. Finally he said,

"I crossed the track of the vulture."

The ladle went motionless. He could hear the old one breathing.

"They brought another column in through the Pass," Ruhaya said. "Many men and more guns that make big thunder."

"For many moons they have done so. Yet these things do us no hurt."

Ruhaya looked steadily at his father.

"There were others, this day, riding with the white warriors. There were the ones with pans and pickaxes; the seekers of gold."

"The white man is strange," Tsahuni said slowly. "He brings guns and builds forts, yet he does not touch us. The seal was made long years ago; he has never broken his bond. This is our land. But as long as the white man comes in peace we do not question his coming."

Ruhaya stared at the fire. His voice was toneless.

"This day I questioned him." Lean fingers traced the ragged welt on his cheek. "This day he gave an answer."

The old, quick eyes went narrow. "An answer?"

"That the forts are a good thing," Ruhaya said. "That the soldiers are here to protect us." His mouth-corner twisted down. "Yet the birds of prey sit on their shoulders, the buzzards that would steal our valley." He shook his head slowly. "And even Gentry rode with them."

High up in the settling dark, the crow screamed. A log sagged and sparks spurred up the chimney, and, here in the cabin too, the wind whispered with the voice of Ewen Gentry.

Ruhaya tried not to hear it. He tried to draw strength from the calm movements of the old Cherokee, who packed shongshaga into his long pipe now and lit it with a twig from the hearth. Tsahuni smoked.

"They gave you the answer, my son." Stubborn hope still steadied the words. "Always before they have said truthfully."

"When there was no reason to lie," Ruhaya snapped. "When they knew of no yellow stones in the waters of Ocona Luftee."

The old man smoked. "We have done them no hurt. They will do us none."

"And the stories, my father? The whispers that say they will drive us from these hills, move our people far unto the place of the dying sun—if these stories are true?"

"Then, we stand," Tsauni said. "Then we strike back as in the days of the Raven and the Wise One. And we hold our lands."

Neither of them moved. Ruhaya's face worked. Black eyes probed his.

"Do we not, my son?"

And the wind cried loud in the stillness and sweatbeads stood on Ruhaya's forehead.

"Do we not?" Tsahuni said.

Abruptly, Ruhaya turned away. The voice of his father trailed him, flat and cold.

"Fear was never in the blood of the Cherokee."

Ruhaya wheeled back. "I am not afraid!"

The old one's eyes held level and black. He couldn't meet them.

Then, suddenly harsh in the cabin quiet, the tired bitter words of Ewen Gentry came alive, but spoken now, strangely, by a Cherokee; by the son of an old warrior.

"To run with the tide," Ruhaya was saying. "To move so that our squaws and young will live . . ."

The blank mask of Tsahuni's face stopped him. The old voice cut out like wet rawhide.

"You say you do not fear, and yet . . ."

"No!" A vein throbbed in Ruhaya's throat. "It it not fear. It is only that I cannot hold to dead dreams. These dreams of standing to fight—what chance do they have against blooded horses and guns that can kill from beyond the flight of an arrow? No. Our Chief, Sedotee, will not lie to himself. He will know they are only dreams. The blind childish dreams of old men."

Tsahuni let fly with a brutal backhand slice. Ruhaya's head jolted to one side.

The force of it opened the long scar of the quirt. A thin line of blood trickled down his jaw. Tsahuni stood watching it.

After a while, Ruhaya turned away. The corngruel steamed and bubbled, in need of stirring. Tsahuni did not notice.

"My son," he said.

Ruhaya did not answer.

"There will be peace," the old Cherokee said gently, doggedly. "We will stay in the Valley of our fathers."

Ruhaya did not look at him.

Tsahuni went back to the fire; his step was slower now, tired.

"The meal is cooked," he said. "We will eat."

Ruhaya started for the door.

"My son. We will eat now."

Ruhaya kept walking.

"Where do you go?"

On the sill, Ruhaya stopped. "To the cabin of the Chief," he said. 'To hear the words of Sedotee and Norn, his brother. To ask what the Cherokee will do."

Their eyes locked.

"The old men will answer," Tsahuni said. "The old men will stay," he said flatly. "The old men do not fear."

Ruhaya wheeled sharply and went out.

HEADING north for the cabin of Sedotee, without knowing why, he felt a need to hurry. The crags of Kuwahi reared black above him as he cut through the high pine stands. Trailing branches raked his skin. Brush caught at his driving legs and, somewhere in the dark of the grove, an animal whimpered. Ruhaya didn't really hear it.

Beyond the tall columns of trees, he could see the stockade fires, far down and northward. His step quickened.

There was anger in him. The brand of his father's fist still burned his cheek. He tried to shut out the hurt look of Tsahuni's eyes. He told himself it was not a time for foolish bravery; it was a time for reason. Perhaps Sedotee, the Chief, would be cooler of head and wiser. Perhaps, already, the gods of the sun and moon had counciled him, echoing the words of Ewen Gentry. Perhaps . . .

The thought snapped clean. Ruhaya froze, leg-muscles taut, poised on wideset feet. He swung his head to one side, listening, not breathing. The low whimper came again, nearer now. It wasn't the cry of an animal. Ruhaya's hand lifted to the hunting knife at his belt.

It happened fast. Fingers closed on his ankle like the jaws of a sprung beartrap. Arms reached up from the dark and twisted violently. Ruhaya's knees buckled. The ground came up hard; briar tore at his chest and then a weight was on him, naked sinew and muscle driving him back against the earth.

His clawed hand found a shoulder; the skin was hot and sticky to the touch. A fist drove for his head. Ruhaya caught the wrist and wrenched sideward. The shadow above him screamed out of pain and rolled clear. Ruhaya was on top, then; the knife was free of its doghide sheath. His knees pinned the writhing arms. He lifted the long blade.

"I will not go! Kill me, but I will not go!"

The knife didn't fall. The shrill, hysterical voice stopped it—the voice that spoke in Cherokee dialect. And now, close to him, Ruhaya saw the warped, shadowy face of the Indian; the face of Norn, the brother of his Chief.

Wild words still tumbled from the bleeding mouth; the head rolled from side to side. Norn had been shot through the upper chest. His breathing had a shallow, wet sound; as if a lung had been torn. He had lost a great deal of blood. The hot stickiness matted the hair of his torso. He lurched crazily, trying to be free of Ruhaya.

"Norn!"

The glassy eyes stared. The tongue worked in the wet hole of the mouth. Norn screamed. Ruhaya slapped him once, sharply, across the face. The scream died. The struggling stopped. In the dark thicket, the only sound was the rasp of Norn's breathing. Slowly the eyes focussed.

"Norn. It is I. You speak to Ruhaya."

"Ruhaya . . ."

The head rolled; pain bared Norn's teeth; they were stained with blood.

"What is it?" Ruhaya said. "You hear me, Norn? What happened?"

Norn coughed and leaned against Ruhaya's knee.

"They came," he said thickly. "In the cabin of my brother, Sedotee. We were holding council when they came. Like the

cat. No sound. But the flash of bayonets in the doorway, the blue coats and white faces . . . the guns . . ."

"Sedotee," Ruhaya asked. "They took Sedotee?"

"Bayonets in the firelight. Bayonets cut deep. My brother said we would not go to the stockade. The soldiers laughed." Norn stared, unbelieving, numb. "They laughed at Sedotee, Chief of the Cherokee. He tried to stand free to fight. They used the bayonets then; they used the bayonets with great skill. Sedotee is dead."

"And you?"

"I broke away. They fired and I was hit. I kept running." Norn shook his head. "All down the valley, they take our people; the braves, the squaws—even the children. And our people go. Their chief is dead. Sedotee is dead and they go like sheep to the axe; to the stockade to be driven from their own land."

A hand caught at Ruhaya's arm. "We will warn the others. Some of us must fight. They come after me even now. I heard them beating the brush. Yet if we head south, warn the others . . ."

Ruhaya didn't look at the anxious, pain-warped face. His chest ached with tension.

Norn started to speak again. Fingers clamped on his wrist.

"Still!"

Norn's mouth worked.

"Be still!" Ruhaya's head had lifted. His nostrils quivered.

Norn lay silent now. Ruhaya heard it—the slow careful crunch of boots on brush.

Ruhaya's face turned slightly, then stopped, expressionless, waiting. He could see through the thicket-maze now; see the sky lighter behind the trees, the faint needlepoints of stars. He crouched low, hearing the raw sound of Norn's breathing. It was too loud.

The tread of boots hesitated, then came on. Ruhaya's leg-muscles drew tight. A shadow loomed out of deeper shadow; a figure moved, tall and wary, taut fists holding an Army rifle at the ready. The soldier was only a few yards from the thicket when Norn coughed.

THE WETNESS choked in his throat, torn up from deep in his chest. The soldier swore and wheeled and the gun lifted crazily. He fired blind. The yellow flame stabbed over Ruhaya's head as he closed in low, dug a shoulder into the blue cloth and slammed the trooper to earth.

Frantic hands tried to bring the rifle butt down across Ruhaya's jaw. Ruhaya drove a backhand under the ear. The soldier made one more try. The bayonet raked the Cherokee's thigh and then he got in the second blow, neat and sharp, at the base of the skull. The trooper folded into a briar clump and lay still, breathing slow and heavy, like a man asleep.

Ruhaya lurched to his feet. The old jaw-wound ached. Pain shot up his leg with each bend of the knee. He got back to Norn. The Indian lay crumpled forward in the thicket; there was blood on his lips and his eyes had glazed again.

"My father," Ruhaya said. "My father is alone."

Norn stared. Ruhaya slung the Indian's right arm across his own shoulder and hefted him. Norn could walk. That was about all he could do.

"South," he muttered. "We will go south to warn . . ."

"My father will help you. Come. He has herbs to heal your wound."

They were moving downhill now, but the going wasn't easy. Weaselpits caught at Norn's watery legs. Twice, he fell. Getting him up again was like shouldering a wet log. Blood made long stripes down his chest; it glistened in the pale moonlight. They struck clear of the trees and into the fields of corn and then Ruhaya pulled up short.

He didn't see anything at first. He felt a difference, a stir in the peaceable stillness of his father's land. He heard a faint chink of metal, then a razoredged tongue that spilled out the words of the white man. Norn looked at him, his eyes normal for an instant.

"They have come. Already they have come this far."

Norn swore to his gods in a low voice; he started toward the distant hulk of the cabin. Ruhaya's hands held him. Ruhaya said, "Stay."

"The old one. Your father. They . . ."

Ruhaya said, "You are hurt. Stay. I will go."

He left Norn crouched in the black sha-

dow of the stalks. He went at a low run, loping as the fox lopes, soundless, bearing down on the cabin from the rear. He flattened against the logwall; bark scraped his spine; it was an effort to keep his breathing quiet.

He made the corner just as the two Army men came through the lighted doorway. Tsahuni moved between them, tall and thin and proud. Once, he stopped and would have spoken. One of the troopers gave him a shove.

"All right, old man. Walk when I tell you. Walk!"

The second shove was harder. Tsahuni lost his balance and sprawled in the lamplit dust.

There was no reason then, no quiet thinking in Ruhaya's brain; for a moment, there was only blind rage. His mouth twisted and a hand closed on his knife-hilt. He took one step. A cool circle of metal pressed his spine.

"If it ain't the bright boy. If it ain't the boy with questions. All right, bright boy. Drop the knife."

Ruhaya dropped it. He knew the voice; he knew the square fists that held the rifle trained on him, the heavy blond face, the small axe and leaded quirt looped at the belt. Van Tilgh was beside him, now, nudging the muzzle against his ribs, smiling. He could smell whiskey on the miner's breath.

"All right, question-asker. Join your brave father."

Tsahuni had regained his feet. He looked old and tired; his eyes were flint-cold. Ruhaya did not meet his stare. Moving forward into the light Ruhaya watched the soldiers, the glint of long gunbarrels levelled on his father's chest.

Van Tilgh laughed at the Army men.

"Didn't know about this one, did you? Real smart, this one. Chockfull of clever questions. I reckoned he might be too smart for trooperboys so I just tagged along with . . ."

The noise stopped him, the crashing rustle of cornstalks beside the cabin. One of the soldiers shouted, "Look out!" and Van Tilgh whirled, pulling the rifle into play. Norn came in fast, lurching wildly and screaming, his blood very red in the light from the doorway.

He didn't have a chance. He was half-blind. His legs buckled as Van Tilgh drove the metal butt sidewise under his jaw. Norn went down in a manlong billow of dust. The scream came out of agony now. Van Tilgh towered over him.

"Another one," he grated. "Another bright boy."

His heavy boot hauled back. Ruhaya tensed for the spring, but a gun turned on him. One of the soldiers snapped,

"Easy, Van Tilgh. No more of that."

Van Tilgh frowned. His bull neck was red and swollen, but he didn't let go the kick. He laughed thickly and turned away.

The soldier looked at Ruhaya. "Help him."

RUHAYA went to Norn's side. The chestwound was bleeding again, slow and heavily; breath bubbled in the Indian's throat. Ruhaya looked up.

"He is bad hurt. He needs care."

The trooper said, "We join the column below here. We march down to the stockade. He'll be treated there."

Ruhaya didn't move. "He needs care now."

A ragged laugh got through Van Tilgh's damp lips. "Like I told you. He's a smart one."

The soldier did not argue anymore. He raised the rifle and trained it on Norn's skull; his finger curled on the trigger. That was enough.

Ruhaya got Norn to his feet. Weakened knees sagged; wild Cherokee words choked in Norn's throat. Tsahuni crossed and took hold of him from the other side. For a minute, then, Ruhaya looked straight at his father.

You see, his eyes said; you see now. You cannot watch Norn die. You cannot stand and watch the blood of Cherokee braves and squaws darken the earth. You cannot argue with a bullet. Better, then, to go. Better to move ahead of the tide.

The old man did not speak. His face was weary and expressionless, but there was still a question behind his mask. And if we go? he seemed to ask. Will the tide ever end? Will the floods ever leave us alone?

Van Tilgh took the lead. Half-carrying Norn between them, Ruhaya and his father followed. The troopers brought up the rear. Their guns were primed for fir-

ing.

The downhill trace was long and pitted and treacherous with shale. Norn was a sagging deadweight. He muttered in a thick, delirious voice. The bleeding got worse. Once he coughed and a thin red stream ran from his mouth. The father and son halted.

Ruhaya said, "This man needs . . ."

A long gun prodded his back. They went on.

Halfway down, the trail levelled off and broke onto a wide, open ledge. They found the column waiting. Ruhaya looked down the straggling line of silent Cherokee faces; braves stared back dully like men in a dream. Squaws held babies close in their shawls and the children clung in little knots, wide-eyed, watching the slow, pacing soldiers who patrolled the length of the column. Lost children, Ruhaya thought. All of them children without a leader.

The troopers moved warily scanning the dark faces. There were not many soldiers. But the rifles they gripped in tight fists gave them the strength of many. Ruhaya and Tsahuni fell in at the end of the line. A few of the Cherokees turned to stare at the blood matted on Norn's chest. They did not speak but something hardened in their eyes.

An officer came along the bench, quick-stepping, barking orders. The Indians shifted and faced north down the road that headed for the stockade. The officer reached the tail of the line and said,

"Everything ready, Van Tilgh . . ."

Then he saw Ruhaya and stopped short.

The Captain's mouth thinned; his eyes moved uneasily to Tsahuni, to the broken figure that hung between father and son. The officer looked at Van Tilgh.

"Wounded?"

Van Tilgh started to answer.

Evenly, Ruhaya said, "Badly wounded. He needs rest. With every step the bleeding is worse."

The young captain stood there, white-lipped, uncertain.

Van Tilgh said, "The Major wants them in the stockade tonight. Most of the columns are already there. We'll be late."

The words did something to the captain. His eyes went blank. He wasn't a man anymore; he was a duty-machine in uniform. He turned abruptly from the sight of Norn.

"All right!" he shouted. "You know the orders, men. Mah-harch!"

III

THEY MARCHED. The Cherokees obeyed like sleepwalkers, voiceless, without hope of waking. The young officer went forward quickly to take the lead. For a moment, Ruhaya and his father did not move.

Van Tilgh smiled through the haze of whiskey.

"You heard the Captain. March!"

Ruhaya's chest felt tight; blood throbbed in his temples. But the rifle in Van Tilgh's hands was aimed dead center on Tsahuni's chest. In the end, without a word, Ruhaya took a stronger grip on the limp body of Norn. They walked. They followed the long, oxenlike line of Cherokee prisoners.

Ahead, the hills pitched steep to the pass-floor; the ledge trail twisted through dry washes and matted brush. There was no talking now; there was only the wind in the crags high above them, wailing like a squaw in mourning; the wind and the shuffle of aimless feet and the frightened whimper of a Cherokee baby.

Then, between them, Norn stirred. His head lifted; his eyes cleared for a second, widened with sudden realization. Ruhaya felt the battered form stiffen, felt the cry rip up from the lungs.

"No! We will not go! We will stay in the hills of Kuwahi!"

Ruhaya and the old one tried to hold him. It was no good. A last surge of power that was more than human tore him free of their grappling fingers. Norn screamed and spun on Van Tilgh.

"Hear this! Hear the word of Sedotee, my brother, Chief of the Cherokee! We will stay!"

Indians halted and turned to stare. Up at the spearhead a dark figure wheeled; the Captain swore and started down the line on the double. He didn't get there in time.

Norn went in wild and blind and Van Tilgh did not even stop smiling. He stepped to one side, clear of the clutching fists; the leaded quirt flicked up in his free hand, lifted and sliced down, viciously, just as Norn lunged past. The

full force of it slammed across the bleeding wound.

A sudden growl ran through the Cherokees.

The Captain yelled, "Van Tilgh, you fool!"

Norn had stopped dead. His legs folded and he went to his knees, teetering that way for a moment. The hemorrhage came as he toppled forward, a bright red river spilling from nose and mouth, soaking into the moonwhite shale. Even after he had quit breathing, the blood kept coming. The troopers stared. Van Tilgh swore hoarsely and took a step toward the broken form. The hobnail boot swung back.

That was when Ruhaya charged.

Pent-up rage ripped the Cherokee war cry from his throat. The scream crashed like chain-lightning in the mountains of Kuwahi, echoing from mouth to mouth. Even as he moved in, Ruhaya saw the surge of motion all down the line, the wheel and lunge of bronze bodies. He saw soldiers stagger back, pulling their guns around, and heard the young officer shrill, "Cover! Take Cover!" Only it was too late for military orders. Panicked troopers fired blind into the mob. An old warrior clutched at his shoulder and pitched forward. Squaws screamed, shielding children with their bodies. The Indians kept charging.

Ruhaya didn't see the rest. All he saw then was Van Tilgh's square face close to his, the bared teeth and bloodshot eyes, the straining tendons of the bullneck. His arms locked with Van Tilgh's; he caught the wrist of the gunhand, wrenched it back and up. Van Tilgh bellowed and the fingers splayed, letting the rifle clatter to earth. Ruhaya kicked it clear. His fist collared Van Tilgh, twisting the home spun shirtfront; his free hand lifted and hammered down into the warped face.

He kept hitting; beating his knuckles into the broken nose, the split, bleeding lips. Van Tilgh's fingers clawed at him; the huge body heaved and a bony knee drove high into Ruhaya's groin. His grip broke. His eyes blurred and he went back, stumbling, off-keel. He fell and then Van Tilgh was on his feet, laughing through that bloody mouth, grabbing at the fallen rifle and pumping the lever, swinging the muzzle full on Ruhaya's face. The Cherokee rolled to one side.

But the shot did not come. All along the bench, cries lifted and guns spurted red needles into the night, but Van Tilgh never pulled the trigger.

Ruhaya saw his father come in low from the side, saw Van Tilgh try to spin at the last minute and the way Tsahuni straightened to his full, lean height. The Cherokee knife went up and down, up and down again, burying itself hilt-deep in the white throat. Van Tilgh fell where he had stood, not far from the body of Norn. He did not move again. The rifle was still in his hand. His blood drained into the sandy shale, mingling slowly with the blood of Norn.

It was over then. There were Cherokee wounded. An old man's squaw nursed the torn muscles of his upper arm; a brave sat quiet, his teeth set against the pain of a shell-shattered knee. But a handful of soldiers hadn't stood long against the turn of the tide.

Ruhaya straightened, sweating and breathing heavily, staring down the long ramp of the hill. Cherokees held the rifles now. They stood silent, watching the black brush below them, the pale ribbons of the pass-floor that trailed off toward the stockade. Once, briefly, a knot of blue-coated figures slithered into view, moving fast, like cottontails with a hound-dog on their scent.

A gnarled bony hand touched Ruhaya's arm. He turned and stared at his father. This time he did not look away. After a moment they locked arms, hand to wrist, gripping tight and warm. Tsahuni said, "My son." And there was quiet pride in the saying of it.

The Cherokees came along the bench in a gathering crowd to the spot where Tsahuni stood beside his son.

The women did not speak; the braves were silent, but a question was in the eyes that watched Ruhaya and his father steadily, the eyes of men who waited to be led. Ruhaya looked at his father. The old one nodded. Ruhaya turned then to the waiting faces of his people. And his voice was deep and strong.

"We are Cherokees. This is the land of our fathers. It is our land."

The Indians murmured and drew closer, no longer dull-eyed and expressionless.

"We will go unto the hills, high above the forests of Ocora Luftee, even to the highest peak of Kuwahi. And we will stay."

The murmur grew louder and more sure. On the fringe of the crowd a man said, "They will come. The seven thousand will come with the guns that speak thunder. We will die."

Ruhaya's shoulders squared. "Then we will die on our own soil."

The braves stirred with remembered strength, now. The women nodded. Beside his son, Tsahuni stood tall as the great mountain bear. He lifted one hand and the Cherokees listened.

"Some of us are lost," the old man said. "Some will be herded like beasts into a strange, dead land." The full mouth set hard. "But we are here. We are in the hills of Kuwahi and our children will be in the hills of Kuwahi and their children."

The voice lifted like a rising wind.

"I say we will not die. If the bear of the mountains is strong enough, if he stands to fight, even to the death, then the hunter may leave him in peace. If the eagle flies high and wisely then the shell of the white man's gun can never touch him."

That night the long trek started, the long march into the stronghold of Kuwahi Peak. Side by side, Tsahuni and his son led the way. And from that night, the Cherokees spoke of Tsahuni with deep quiet pride in their words. They called him the Eagle of Kuwahi.

THE REST was waiting. A night and a day and a night of waiting. They had come up through the last pinebrake, beyond the timberline, over paths that had not felt the strike of the white man's boot. Their camp was a cove cut in the shoulder of Kuwahi, in the cool, windless shadow of the peak, walled round on three sides by sheer rock. The open mouth of the cove faced North and, from a broad slab of jutting stone they could see the restless pinpoint fires of the stockade far down in Ocona Luftee.

They did not build fires that night. They did not eat. The old men curled in their blankets and the women sang ancient songs of peace to hungry, weary children. They slept and, on the lookout stone, Cherokee braves lay belly-flat, silent, watching the valley. Unsleeping, Tsahuni squatted on crossed legs; his eyes did not leave the fort. At his side, Ruhaya stood tall against the setting moon, gripping the metal and wood of an Army rifle.

The sun rose and a party of hunters ranged warily down into the high timber. The camp ate wild rabbit and drank root tea and, before noon, the sentries on the rock saw the start of the westward removal.

Ruhaya stood silent and watched the blue-coated ants scurry across the parade of the fort, saw the long column of captured Cherokees march out through wide-swung gates, slow and tired, and the mounted soldiers who trotted up and down harrying the line as a sheepdog worries the pack.

The sentries of the rock muttered Indian curses. A thin, stripling boy clutched his captured gun and spoke through tight dry lips.

"Let them come. Let them try to take us, too."

And it was not only the voice of the boy; it was the voice of every man in camp. Sitting quiet, Tsahuni studied their faces; he saw the high lean shadow of his son against the bright sky, poised and ready. The Eagle of Kuwahi nodded. He was content.

The change came in the evening of the second day. The Cherokee prisoners were long gone toward the dying sun, and in the dusk now the stockade lay suddenly lifeless. The uniformed ants no longer ran from hut to hut. No echo of busy shouting sifted up through the pass. It was too quiet. Tsahuni looked at his son and Ruhaya said, "They hold council now. This night they decide."

The Cherokee camp was silent. Women sat by tiny shielded fires and children forgot to play. Softly, an old warrior muttered the war chants of his fathers, and the young braves moved like shadows, freeing their knives, checking the chambers of the few guns they had.

In the darkness before moonrise, they lay still at the cove-mouth; dark eyes raked the long drop of the mountain-face; taut muscles ached. Soundlessly, Ruhaya paced the rock, passing a reassuring word from

man to man. Once, far off, a cat screeched and the stripling brave leaped up, cocking his rifle.

"Patience," Ruhaya murmured. "Patience, young one."

The boy settled down. Tsahuni sat at his post, a motionless part of the rock; only the old eyes moved and narrowed and watched. Slowly the moon came up.

Ruhaya heard the noise first. His spine went ramrod-stiff; the hair at the base of his skull felt tight. He sensed his father's quick glance and heard one of the bucks whisper, "Hark!"

Ruhaya lifted his hand. No one spoke again. Behind them, in the cove, a child began to cry almost without sound. The noise came again, light and nearly lost under the soughing of night wind—the snap and whish of bramble underfoot. It came from the right, just below the sentinel rock, in the black maw of the timber.

Ruhaya's gaze swung to a sudden shiver of leaves and brush. A brave rolled to his feet; a rifle glinted and arched up, drawing bead on the tall figure that broke clear of the pines and stood unshielded in the bright moonlight.

Ruhaya said, "Hold!"

The command cut across dark stillness. The Cherokee froze; slowly the gun-barrel lowered. Old Tsahuni did not move. Neither did Ruhaya. His black stare was fixed on the figure in the clearing, the lank arms and torso clad in buckskin, the leggins of fringed hide, the long, sharp-planed mask of Ewen Gentry's face.

Gentry was not carrying a rifle. Deliberately, as they watched, he unhitched the shell-belt at his hips, the holster and sheathed knife. He let them fall at his feet, and stood silent, unarmed.

Ruhaya's expression did not change. He flicked a glance at Tsahuni. The Eagle of Kuwahi nodded. In a flat, clear voice, Ruhaya shouted,

"Come."

Ewen Gentry began to walk, long measured strides, his hands swinging empty at his thighs. The braves on the sentinel rock did not relax. Their gunsights followed Gentry.

Gentry halted a few yards from Tsahuni and his son. He ignored the trained guns. His hand came out for the clasp of friendship.

Ruhaya looked at it. He did not take it. Ewen Gentry smiled faintly and let the arm fall to his side. The smile faded when he said,

"I come from the White Leader."

The Cherokees stood there staring.

Gentry said, "Over the council fire I have spoken to him. And I come now with his word."

Ruhaya looked at the scout evenly.

"There have been many words," he said tonelessly. "The white man speaks with honey but his tongue is forked."

A muscle ridged Gentry's jaw. He turned to the squatting, blanket-wrapped figure of Tsahuni.

"You will not surrender, then."

The old man's eyes only flickered. It was Ruhaya who answered.

"A stand must be made. We have chosen the time and the place."

The smile came back; Gentry's glance moved from father to son; there was a hint of satisfied pride in his nod.

Gently, Tsahuni said, "And this time, Ewen Gentry? This time the white man will *keep* his word?"

Their eyes met square. Under the worn buckskin, Gentry's shoulders went straight.

"WE ARE not all Van Tilghs," he said. "I tell you this: from the start, there were many white men who hated this business. We are not all crows who wanted to feed in the fields of the Cherokee." The lips bent in that taut smile. "And even those who were—they sing another tune now. They have heard of the rout on the ledge; they have heard of Tsahuni and his son, and they know: The man who walks on the ground can never fight the eagle who flies."

Braves stirred now and muttered and the noose of watchers tightened.

"They could try," Gentry said. "The White Leader could send seven thousand into the forests of Kuwahi. They might find you and kill you but many of them would die."

Ruhaya's face was dark and tense. There was something more, his mind warned. There were some words not yet spoken because they were hard to say. His eyes narrowed on Ewen Gentry.

"Then they will leave us in peace?" he asked.

He could hear Gentry breathing. A frown shadowed the white scout's sun-bleached eyes. Finally the hard words came.

"Ocona Luftee will belong to the Cherokee for all time—after a debt has been paid."

Tsahuni looked up with black, quick eyes, but his tone was still gentle.

"A debt?" he asked.

Gentry pulled air deep into his lungs. His voice had an edge now.

"A white man was killed last night. Van Tilgh—a white man who was not of the Army. The miners are roused. They call it murder. They demand blood for blood."

The noose surged inward; the mutter lifted to a growl and one brave raised his rifle. The Eagle of Kuwahi said, "Wait."

The sound died; checkreined anger throbbed in Indian eyes.

Quietly, Gentry said, "It is the law of the whites. Blood for blood. Or the miners take action; force the Army to attack your camp. A Cherokee must come to the stockade. A Cherokee must face the guns of the firing squad. And from where the sun stands at the moment of his death your people will be free. Ocona Luftee will be theirs."

Tsahuni did not speak. The anger was gone now; squaws and bucks watched the squatted figure with something new in their faces—some stirring flicker of remembered hope. Ruhaya did not wait for his father's word. In a quiet voice he said,

"I killed the man called Van Tilgh."

Ewen Gentry frowned. The Cherokees murmured.

"Speak to the White Leader," Ruhaya said. "Tell him his terms will be met."

"No, my son."

The bright blanket rustled like the stirring of powerful wings; Tsahuni rose slowly to his full height. Someone whispered, "The Eagle speaks," and there was no other sound.

Father and son stood facing each other. In the same quiet voice, Ruhaya said,

"I am not afraid."

The old lips bent slightly; the bony chin lifted. "You are a Cherokee, my son. A Cherokee is strong enough to die." The shadow of a smile faded. "Yet there is another kind of strength."

Tsahuni did not say the rest of the words. There was no need. They were there in the steady black brilliance of his old eyes.

I have a dream, my son. Our people will live. The young braves will go again into the coves of Ocona Luftee; they will take squaws and their women will bear men-children. Their sons will till the fields of our valley, and their sons after them. And in the years to be the Cherokee will be many and strong again and at peace in his own land. I have a dream, my son. The young braves are the seed of my dream. And the seed must not perish.

"Another kind of strength," Tsahuni said aloud, then. "The young men must be strong enough to live—and watch an old man die."

The Cherokees stirred and Ruhaya's lips opened to speak. The glance of Tsahuni stopped him. Ruhaya straightened and his jaw was a hard-drawn line. All he said was, "Yes, my father."

High in the stillness, an eagle screamed. Tsahuni turned to face the white scout.

"I will come," he said quietly. "Before the sun is high the debt will be paid."

For a long minute Ewen Gentry did not move. His face was pale and gaunt, but that proud smile touched his lips. In the end he held out his hand. He locked wrists with the Eagle of Kuwahi. The grip was strong and final.

IV

MORNING WAS a pale haze on the rim of the Smokies; birds stirred in their rooks and made a shrill music. Dawn-mists still clung to the high rocks when the two Cherokees quit the camp under Kuwahi Peak. They went slowly by ancient Indian paths and, after a while, behind them, they could hear the women singing the death chant.

They did not look back; they did not speak. Tsahuni walked straight now and sure of foot, draped in the robes and amulets of the warrior, no longer old of face and body, somehow as tall and young as the son who walked at his side.

The stockade was waiting. Ewen Gentry had gone ahead, carrying back the answer of the Eagle, and now the high palisade catwalk was lined with blue-coated men,

armed and wary. Ruhaya and his father went down the last slopes onto the green flats of the valley; into the pass that stretched north across a meadow to the double gates of the fort.

The man-tall wicket was open and, inside, a column of troopers stood to attention, charged rifles to shoulder, statue-like in the sun-bright dust of the parade. The Commanding Major came forward, Ewen Gentry pacing at his side. The Major lifted one hand in a smart salute. Ruhaya heard the wicket slam sharply behind them.

Bayonets winked white in the sun. Tsahuni and his son stood silent, watching the broad dusty-blue figure of the Major, the stiff black beard, the still-wary eyes that reached across the compound to the sutler's building, where a crowd of miners waited, hard-faced and determined.

Finally, the Major said, "You have come."

A glint of humor touched the old Cherokee's face.

"You did not believe I would, Major?"

There was no answer. Uneasily, the Major flicked a glance at Gentry. Then his eyes steadied. His tone went calm and official.

"There is a paper to be signed."

Tsahuni only nodded. The Major and Gentry led the way past the rigid column of the firing squad, past the watching miners and across a low portico into the cool shadows of Headquarters Building.

The room was quiet and musty-smelling; faint sunlight touched the Union flag that draped one wall. The Major stood by the yellow-oak desk and read the words from the long white paper, the words of faith and hope. He picked up a quill pen and set his name at the foot of the writing. He held out the pen to Tsahuni. A minute passed. Tsahuni looked straight at the White Leader, his stare bright and probing. At last he took the quill and made the sign of an eagle's spread wings on the paper. He set the pen down.

The Major stood very stiff; his boots shifted. His voice was hard to control.

"There is no more to be done," he said. "The squad is waiting."

Tsahuni's expression did not change. He simply nodded and turned toward the door. But in that moment, something wavered in the bronze mask of Ruhaya's face. His mouth worked and sudden fingers closed on the old thin arm.

"My father . . ."

He didn't say any more. Tsahuni looked at him quietly and said, "The bargain has been made, Ruhaya." And dark, sounding eyes swung to the Major. "Our promise will be kept."

The Major straightened, gave the old Cherokee a salute. The movement was touched with a deep, growing respect.

"All promises will be kept," the Major said.

Ruhaya let go of his father's arm. They went out into the morning light, side by side, looking neither right nor left.

On the sutler's porch, the knots of miners grew tighter with remembered anger. They watched the Eagle of Kuwahi cross the parade with slow even strides, his head high, his eyes unblinking against the sun. They saw him pause for a second and the way his hand held the hand of his son. That was all.

Ruhaya stood very still, his arms at his sides, watching his father walk to the north wall, then turn with his back to the long palisade, facing the line of soldiers. Nobody mentioned a blindfold. Gentry stood silent at Ruhaya's elbow. Once, strong fingers gripped the Cherokee's arm. Gentry nodded and winked. Somehow, that helped.

The Major took his position. His saber flashed up and the squad came to attention. He snapped an order; stocks came against padded shoulders, bayonets quivvered with light.

"Fire!"

Ruhaya stood there. Only his hands knotted once at his sides; the knuckles showed dead white. The blast crashed out across the valley and died a slow death in the foothills and there was a sting of burnt powder on the hot, still air. Tsahuni fell slowly, like an old tree touched at last by the broadaxe, but a tree with taproots sunk into the good soil of Ocona Luftee, deep and undying.

Nobody moved. Army horses nickered and, slowly, the execution detail lowered their rifles. Boots moved away, single-file, lifting a small fog of dust around the miners grouped under the sutler's awning.

BRIDE OF THE TOMAHAWK PACK

By PRATT MESSER

Deadly as the speeding arrow; sly as the moccasined stalker, the siren Cheyenne squaw planted her charms and her guile among the blue-coated legions of Fort Dodge . . . then touched off the fuse that dynamited Little Bear's painted braves into a savage war of attrition.

ALTHOUGH there remained an hour before "taps," the post had settled down for a quiet, warm night punctuated only by the soft playing of a harmonica in one of the enlisted men's barracks and an occasional ripple of laughter. From the windows in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters along Officer Row streamed yellow shafts of light through which the shadow of a recruit sentry passed at regular intervals. Beyond "Sudsville," where lived the non-commissioned officers with their wives—most of whom did post washing to subsidize the meager army pay of their husbands—was the stockade, the outer defense of the fort, a log wall some twenty feet in height, and guarded by more of the blue-uniformed sentries. This was Fort Dodge, Wyoming; the furthest outpost of the Bozeman Trail.

First Lieutenant Lee F. Dupuy, Cavalry, slammed the door of the BOQ behind him and strode across the parade field through the still night, buttoning his dark-blue tunic as he walked. He passed the flag staff, white and lofty in the moonlight, and paused before a well-lighted hutment, larger than the rest of the living quarters on the post and bearing the yellow guidon of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment. As he made a final adjustment of his uniform, he read the sign which he had so often seen before, and which always put him uneasily on his guard:

COLONEL MATTHEW HANKS
COMMANDING
3RD CAVALRY REGT.
FT. DODGE

As he put his boot on the first step, Lee heard the Colonel's voice raised in anger.

"And you can damned well stay inside when you're drunk, Mary!" said the Colonel loudly.

Lee winced. He had no intentions of breaking into a quarrel between the Colonel and his wife, but he didn't see how it could be avoided. The CO had sent for him. A woman inside replied in a low voice that he couldn't understand; then the Colonel spoke again.

"Leave that out of it! It's dropped, you hear me? It's over. I've sent him back to his Troop, and you won't have him around everytime I leave the post! I don't mind you making a fool of yourself, but I won't have you disgracing me before my command! Do you hear me? This new Striker is a Mexican and I won't have you in the same room with him unless I'm present. Do you understand that, Mary? Answer me!"

"You righteous creature, you!" replied the woman, raising her voice. "You don't need me; you're married to a cavalry uniform and a book of Army Regulations. You and your attempts at respectability! Don't you think I know about you and that Indian girl? Do you think you could install her in my house as a domestic servant and me not see what was going on? You make me laugh, Matt! What did you expect me to do, sit back and welcome her like a civilized half-sister from Cincinnati?"

"Leave Pearl out of this!" commanded the Colonel sternly.

Lee stood before the hutment quietly listening. The Colonel's domestic troubles were the common gossip of the garrison, and Lee would have preferred to have reported to his Commanding Officer in the morning, but giving

Easily, unhurriedly, the Indian girl swung her musket around on the commanding officer and very deliberately pulled the trigger.

the tail of his tunic a final brave tug, he stamped boldly on the steps and walked heavily across the wooden planks of the porch.

"If he can't hear this," thought Lee, "he's deaf."

As he knocked on the doorway, he heard an excited scurrying inside, and through the shutters he caught sight of Mrs. Mary Hanks hurrying out of the room. She was a handsome, dark-haired woman in her early thirties, much younger than the Colonel himself.

"Come in," said Col. Hanks unpleasantly.

Lee pushed open the door and stood with his cap tucked under his arm.

"Lt. Dupuy reporting to the Commanding Officer as directed, sir," he said, saluting.

"Come in, mister; come in," said Hanks. "I didn't intend to arouse you after you'd retired."

"I hadn't retired, sir."

"No?" The Colonel looked him up and down. "Then you make a practice of dressing without your sash, mister?"

Knowing well that he had left his yellow dress sash across the foot of his bunk, Lee did not reply.

"You are out of uniform; aren't you, mister?"

"Damn you, Hanks," thought Lee to himself.

"Answer me, sir, when I address you!"

"I seem to have forgotten it when your Striker called for me, sir." Lee started to say 'new' Striker, but thought better of it. "I came immediately."

"You . . . seemed to have forgotten it . . .," mocked the Colonel. "A careless officer doesn't last long in my command, mister. Bear that in mind."

"Yes, sir."

"I sent for you because it has occurred to me that the Cheyenne might be tempted to bolt off their reservation with the coming of this warm weather. The Southern Cheyenne have gone on the war path in Colorado, and some of our own reservation Indians want to join them. They're pretty restless.

"The monthly supply train left Fort Laramie last Saturday, and they should be about sixty miles east of our post right now. In the morning you will take your platoon and escort them in. You'll be gone a day or so."

"Does the Colonel expect trouble from American Dog, sir?" asked Lee.

"I don't believe I've put you at ease, mister!"

Lee hit a brace.

"We signed a treaty with old Chief American Dog at Powder River last Fall, but his war Chief, Little Bear, has been stirring up the tribe again. He wants to take his braves, the Crazy Dog society, off the reservation to join the Southern Cheyenne. American Dog doesn't want to let him go, but he'll follow the will of his people. Little Bear is a powerful chief. All during the war he had it his own way out here, and he thinks the Wyoming Territory is just a Cheyenne back yard."

"Yes, sir."

"I've got the only two passages to the south—the East Cut and Broken Arrow Canyon—watched by our friendly Crow scouts. The Cheyenne can't slip through there. The only trouble they can cause us is raiding inside the Territory. And they might want to knock over that supply train, if they think they can get away with it. Any questions, mister?"

"No, sir," saluted Lee. Turning in his tracks, he walked stiffly from the room.

Outside on the parade field again he put his cap on his head and looked around uncertainly. Then he walked briskly across the way to the enlisted barracks which housed his platoon, and hearing the laughter inside the building, he smiled and stopped.

SANCHEZ, his platoon sergeant, between sketches of tunes on his harmonica, was telling the new recruits about Little Bear's Cheyenne lance. Sanchez was a good soldier. In the Confederate army, before he was made prisoner at Gettysburg, he had commanded his own Troop.

"Old Matt will give fifty U. S. dollars to the man that captures it," Sanchez was saying. "It's an old 16th Century Spanish lance that's been in Little Bear's tribe for generations. The Cheyenne probably took it from the Spanish explorers three hundred years ago!"

Lee thought of the steel lance. He'd seen it only once, last fall when they had fought the Cheyenne at Powder River,

and drove them back on their reservation. He'd seen the half-breed Little Bear, magnificent in his chief's war-bonnet, charge two Infantry soldiers and run them both through with a single thrust. Because he thought the weapon was charmed, Little Bear wouldn't go into battle without it. Colonel Hanks had a standing reward offered for its capture.

"Not for five hundred dollars would I risk my neck for the damned thing," came a second voice from the barracks.

Lee frowned. Through the window he saw a tall, dark-haired trooper rise from his cot. He was slender and quick of movement, and was about Lee's own age. This was the Colonel's former Striker, Private Cooke.

"It may be," said Sanchez, "that you'll risk your neck in spite of everything, if Little Bear leads his Crazy Dogs off their reservation this Spring."

Cooke snorted.

Lee was sorry to have him back for platoon duty. He was well-read and intelligent, but an agitator and a trouble-maker in the Troop. He had never been discreet regarding his affairs with the Colonel's wife, and exactly why he had left the East to join the army Lee didn't know.

"'. . . and Trooper Cooke will be replaced by Trooper Juarez as my Striker. Private Cooke will report back to Captain Lonnigan's Troop for duty . . .'," sang out another voice from inside the barracks, mocking Colonel Hanks' words that afternoon at retreat.

There was laughter in the barracks.

"Go to hell," said Cooke unpleasantly.

"A cheer for Trooper Cooke and the Colonel's Lady!" said another voice.

"Go to hell," said Cooke again, loudly.

"That's all right, Cooke," laughed another trooper. "If you can't get the Old Man's wife, maybe you can get his Injun gal, Pearl White Feathers!"

At that another laugh went up from the cavalry soldiers.

"And if you don't want the Injun gal' you can send her over to the barracks," laughed the voice.

Lee could see Trooper Cooke stretched out on his cot again, apparently undisturbed by the taunts of his saddle mates. He was not too well liked by them.

Lee glanced about him and strode into the lighted barracks.

"Attention!" bellowed Sgt. Sanchez, who saw the young officer first.

"As you were!" called Lee quickly as the troopers rose to their feet; then, in a lower voice to Sanchez, "Have the platoon ready to move out at five in the morning, Sergeant, in full marching order, and 14 rounds of ammunition per carbine. We'll travel light and draw our ammunition from the wagon train we're going to escort in from Fort Laramie.

"Trouble with the Cheyenne already, Lieutenant?"

"No, not yet. The Colonel just wants to be prepared. We'll take the whole platoon," said Lee, raising his eyes toward Trooper Cooke. Will there be any absences?"

"Only a man in the guardhouse, sir," smiled the Sergeant.

"Very well. Then the men can get their breakfast at the mess hall at four-thirty. Any questions?"

"No, sir," saluted Sanchez.

"Good-night, Sergeant," saluted Lee.

He walked across the parade field once again, this time toward Captain Lonnigan's quarters, to tell him that the 1st platoon would not fall out with Troop "C" the next morning. The Captain was new to the Territory. He had been assigned to the 3rd Cavalry only a few months before.

From the windows of the Captain's house streamed a yellow light. As he approached closer, Lee saw two figures seated in the front room—Second Lieutenant Don Braggel, who had the first platoon in "C" Troop, and Captain Lonnigan's nineteen-year-old daughter, Irish. Braggel was engaged to the girl, and they planned to be married when he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant.

Lee decided not to go in. He wouldn't disturb Braggel's heart pursuits. The younger boy had a forward boisterousness about him that both amused and interested Lee. He enjoyed having him in the Troop. Fresh from West Point, the boy was cocky and ambitious, and had not yet dropped the undergraduate traditions of the war college. He had missed the war, but was determined to see some action

on the Indian frontier. Lee was entertained by the thought that, given an opportunity, the boy would fight the whole Indian nation single handed to catch the eye of the Captain's daughter.

Turning away from the Captain's quarters, he walked across the field toward the BOQ and entered.

As he passed down the hall, Lee looked in on Lt. Donahue's room, and found the old white-haired officer of "C" Troop, 3rd Platoon, stretched out on his cot reading the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* He was sixty-one years old and had commanded his own Regiment during the war, brevetted twice, but had been reduced to a First Lieutenant again to await his retirement.

"I just left a friend of yours, Lieutenant," smiled Lee from the doorway.

"Oh, Lee, come in; come in," said the old officer cordially, rising from his cot and closing the book. "What friend have I in this forsaken hole?"

"Colonel Hanks," laughed Lee.

"Old Matt? May his soul burn in hell! You know he served under me for a while at the beginning of the war. He made Brigadier later."

"Yes, I know," said Lee.

"What did he want? Ask you to shoot that Trooper in your platoon for infringing upon his marital tranquility?"

"No, not as bad as all that," smiled Lee.

"I noticed at Retreat this afternoon that he replaced that trooper with a new Striker. Matt's a fool."

Lee laughed. "It is a pretty sad situation," he agreed. "This Trooper Cooke is a trouble-maker. I wish the Colonel hadn't sent him back to me."

"Oh well," said Donahue, "I'll be out of it all in another month or so. Forty-two years of it! God, I must have been a crazy young fool when I joined the army. I only hope my retirement comes through before we start another Indian campaign. Hell, Lee, I'm an old man!"

"The Colonel's getting ready for them already," said Lee. "He's sending my platoon out to escort the supply train in from Fort Laramie."

"When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow, early," replied Lee. "I've got to get some sleep."

"Sure, Lee; good-night," said Donahue.

Lee went down the hall to his own room. He took his Spencer repeating carbine from the wall and, from a box in his foot locker, slipped seven 50-cal. metal cartridges into the tube magazine in the butt. After working the action freely several times, he replaced the 39-inch weapon in the rack. From his holster hanging at the foot of his cot he removed a regulation Colt 44-cal. and held the hammer with his thumb while he spun the chamber.

Then he noticed his yellow dress sash across the foot of his cot. Damn you, Hanks. He tossed the sash on his foot locker and sat down on the bunk to remove his boots.

"Pearl White Feathers," he mused. "She must have come up from the Cheyenne Indian school at Laramie."

Undressed, he blew out the oil lamp and crawled into his sack. Got to escort the supply train in from Laramie. In the darkness he heard the sentry in front of the BOQ call out to challenge another officer coming home late. Little Bear's lance. In a few minutes he heard Lt. Broggel come in and enter his room across the hall, singing to himself.

Lee fell asleep before "taps," and dreamed about the Crazy Dog lance.

II

THERE WAS a shouting on the parade field, and Lee opened his eyes and lay quietly listening in the darkness of his room. The shouting continued. Lee took his pocket watch from the footlocker beside his bunk and saw that it was only 2:00 A.M. He had been asleep but a few hours. Then, shattering the quiet of the sleeping post, came the sound of the bugle blowing "Boots and Saddles."

"What the hell?" thought Lee.

He dressed quickly, pulled on his heavy cavalry boots, and buckled on his pistol and saber. He tied a yellow kerchief about his neck for field duty. Taking his Spencer carbine from the rack, he fastened it at his right side to a broad leather belt which slung diagonally across his left shoulder.

As he passed Braggel's room Lee saw the young officer busily loading the tube magazine of his own Spencer. At the op-

posite end of the hall Lt. Donahue ran out of his room slinging a leather riding quirt. The old cavalry soldier was cursing at being "blown out" in the middle of the night.

Lee stepped out the door of the BOQ and saw a scene of utter confusion on the drill field. From the stables troopers with saddles and blankets thrown over their shoulders were leading out their horses. Half-dressed officers hurried across the field buckling on their sabers and pulling on gloves as they ran.

"This must be another of Old Matt's night drills," thought Lee to himself angrily.

Then, from Colonel Hank's quarters, a bugler blew "Officers Call."

"Sgt. Sanchez," called Lee toward the barracks which housed his platoon. "Have someone saddle my mount!"

"Right, sir!" replied the non-com from the building. He stood barefoot in the doorway wearing only his blue trousers and cap.

Lee ran across the parade field with his saber rattling at his side and the butt of the carbine slung from his shoulder slapping him in the rump. A number of officers were already gathered in front of the Colonel's quarters when he arrived. Colonel Hanks, standing properly dressed and calmly waiting on the front porch, glared down at his harassed officers in a manner that bordered on contempt. At his left stood a Negro Infantryman, bloody and bandaged, leaning on the banister for support. A light was burning in the window behind him.

"At last we are all here, gentlemen?" asked Hanks as Lt. Donahue ran up. A chorus of low voices replied,

Lee, standing on the outer fringes of the little group, saw the Colonel's wife come to the window and look out at the assembled officers. She was wearing a night gown with a blanket hastily pulled about her bare shoulders, and her dark hair fell about her neck and formed a soft frame for her face.

"Gentlemen," said Hanks, with an actor's appreciation for the dramatic, "the supply train has been attacked by a large Cheyenne war party."

In the darkness the field-grade officers voiced muttered comments.

"A messenger has just come through to me. The wagons left Fort Laramie last Thursday, instead of Saturday. They were only about twenty miles from here, at Hell's Basin, when they were attacked yesterday afternoon. They are manned by twelve men and a white officer of the 8th Infantry, Negro, this soldier tells me, and he was able to escape only because he was scouting on the forward point. He ran the whole distance to our post on foot."

Hanks looked over the group as if to single out a particular officer.

"Lt. Dupuy!"

"Here, sir," replied Lee.

"Your platoon should be ready to move out. You will advance to the scene of the attack and relieve the Infantry if they are still holding out. If they have been killed, then you will scout the surrounding countryside to determine in which direction the Indians were heading. The Regiment will stand alerted here awaiting your report. Any questions, mister?"

"No, sir."

Lee saluted and hurried back to the barracks of Troop "C's" 2nd platoon. The men were just finishing saddling their horses. He took his own horse from Sgt. Sanchez and mounted.

"Stand to horses," shouted Lee, holding his saber very straight at his side. The platoon fell in by their animals.

"Mount!" commanded Lee. "By two's; Forward—Ho!"

Lee moved his horse to the head of the column and led them out. As they approached the East Gate, the two heavy wooden doors swung inward to let them pass outside the stockade.

"At a trot!" commanded Lee. Then, "At a gallop!"

Behind him he could hear the banging of the sabers as the troopers rode. At his side the Spencer bounced against his back, and he unfastened the carbine and slipped it into the saddle boot under his leg.

"Where to this time, Lieutenant?" asked Sgt. Sanchez pulling abreast of the young officer.

"The supply train was attacked about twenty miles up the Trail. Think we'll make it?"

"If the wagons hold out until nightfall, we'll make it. The Cheyenne won't attack after dark. They think a warrior killed at

night stays in the darkness forever; so they'll wait until morning; then rush the wagons."

After that they rode hard and without speaking, sometimes at a gallop, and again at a walk to ease the horses whenever Lee lifted his arm above his head to signal the platoon. They left the plains and followed the Bozeman Trail into the hill country. Just as the first evidences of dawn streaked the eastern sky in front of them, Lee reined-up his horse at the edge of Hell's Basin, a natural valley through which the Trail cut. The platoon stopped behind him.

Sergeant Sanchez rode up beside Lee and dismounted. "I don't hear any firing," he said."

Lee pointed into the basin. "And you won't hear any, either. They are down there in the basin, Sergeant."

Sanchez followed the gesture of his officer's hand. At the bottom of the slope he saw the burned remains of what had been five wagons, now charred and smoking, and the corpses of the army mules. The stripped, bare bodies of the twelve Negro Infantry soldiers lay sprawled about the wagons and among the dead animals.

"I guess they didn't even have a chance," said Lee, surveying the terrain.

"The Indians probably waited until the column was inside the basin, then swooped down on four sides. They didn't even have time to draw up the wagons in a perimeter defense," agreed Sanchez without enthusiasm.

"Well," said Lee, signaling with his arm, "Let's get down there."

He led the platoon sliding, slipping over the loose earth down the steep hill. When they reached the wagons he signaled for them to dismount.

"We'll have to get this mess cleaned up," said Lee, making it as impersonal as he could. He sat down on the corpse of a mule and pulled an arrow free. "Sergeant, what kind of shaft is this?" he called.

Sanchez walked up. "Cheyenne arrow, Lieutenant."

"How many in the party?"

Sanchez walked over the ground examining the tracks of the Indian ponies. "About a hundred and fifty, I'd say, Lieutenant. They had all the time they needed, too. Had plenty of time to torture their prisoners yesterday afternoon."

He pointed to four mutilated bodies staked out on the ground.

Lee saw Cooke, his face paste white, looking at the bodies. He leaned against his horse and stared at Lee with fixed eyes.

Lee felt sorry for him. "You going to be sick, trooper?"

"No."

"It's pretty awful," said Lee.

"Why don't they fight like human beings instead of beasts!" roared Cooke.

"This is all they know," replied Lee. "They've been torturing their prisoners and hacking up bodies since the stone age."

Cooke came over and sat down on the mule beside Lee. "I guess I'm not used to this business," he said.

"None of us are."

"Were . . . were these people 'scalped'?"

"No," said Lee. "The Cheyenne don't take scalps from Negro soldiers. They call them Buffalo Soldiers because of their short hair and big wooly garrison coats that they wear in winter. The Cheyenne think it's bad medicine to scalp them."

"Look here a minute, Lieutenant," said Sanchez holding a Springfield single-shot musket with a burned and shattered stock. He dangled a looped cord tied to the trigger. "Some of them were able to shoot themselves before they were captured."

Cooke looked at the platoon sergeant. "What is that string?" he asked.

Sanchez, seeing the trooper seated on the mule beside his officer, glared back at him.

"They made a stand," said Sanchez coldly, "and when they saw the savages were going to overrun the wagons, they tied looped cords around their triggers, pulled off their boots, and pulled the triggers with their toes."

"The Infantry is armed with the long-barrel Springfield," explained Lee. "You can't put the muzzle of one of them against your head and reach the trigger at the same time."

"If you're through resting, Trooper; you can help the platoon clean up this business," said Sanchez in his hard drill-field manner. Cooke got up reluctantly and walked away. The platoon sergeant sat

down on the dead mule beside Lee.

"Not only is he a trouble-maker," said Sanchez, "but I suspect he's a coward. I'd hate to know my life depended on him in a skirmish with Little Bear."

"He'll be alright."

"I wish he was back Striking for the Colonel."

Lee ignored the remark. "Sergeant, tell me; why did Trooper Cooke join the army anyway?"

"He was a college man, sir. I hear in the barracks that he got into trouble and had to leave the East."

"Thank you, Sergeant," smiled Lee.

"The Lieutenant is entirely welcome."

The troopers were collecting the bodies in neat rows to await the burial wagons from Fort Dodge. Collecting their dead was a point of honor with the Cavalry. Some of the soldiers were making a bundle of the arrows lying about to take back to the fort. If the guilty Cheyenne could be captured and brought to trial, the shafts would be used as evidence against them.

"Sergeant," called Lee. "Get three men and have them track this war party for a few miles, to see which direction they were heading."

"Right, sir," replied Sanchez. He was looking oddly at the mutilated body of the white officer who had commanded the wagon train. Several troopers had gathered about him.

"What is it?" asked Lee, approaching.

SANCHEZ looked at him for a minute without speaking. "I'm afraid we're in for a bad summer campaign, Lieutenant," he said at last. "This is Little Bear's work all right! He's left the reservation. Remember what he did to Captain Fetterman's patrol at Powder River last fall? This white officer got the same thing. Little Bear didn't scalp him, but he made sure he wouldn't have a whole body when he got to the Happy Hunting Ground! That sneaky Cheyenne half-breed filled the man's mouth full of gun powder and blew his head off! Just like he did to Captain Fetterman!"

Lee grimaced. Up until this time he had acted very well before the platoon. "All right, put him with the rest," he said, not looking down at the man.

Sanchez started to say something to him, then turned back to the troopers. "All right. You heard the Lieutenant. Put him with the others."

Lee went back and sat down, digging his saber in the ground before him between his feet. He had been raised on the frontier, but he still had a cold feeling on the back of his scalp when it came to Indian raids.

Sanchez came up presently. "We've done all we can do for now, Lieutenant. We'll have to go back and send the burial wagons to pick up this."

"Your patrol is out, Sergeant?"

"I sent three men to trail the Cheyenne, sir. They'll catch up with us later."

"Then have the men mount up."

The sun was well in the morning sky when Lee led his platoon back out of the basin. Having ridden hard during the night, the platoon moved their horses at a trot, pausing only now and then to await the "advance" signal of the two troopers who were scouting on the point ahead of the column.

Hearing a shrill whistle behind him, Lee turned in his saddle and saw the trooper scouting the rear lift his carbine with both hands above his head.

"Somebody riding hard down the trail behind us, Lieutenant," said Sanchez taking his Spencer from his saddle boot.

The next moment three blue-clad cavalry soldiers galloped around the bend and pulled up sharply beside the officer.

"We followed them Cheyenne, Lieutenant," said the Corporal saluting Lee. "We tracked them about four miles, and found where they camped last night. They were heading north; then they swung west toward the Fort. Hard to say where they were going, sir."

"Sergeant," said Lee. "We'd better ride over to Will Eubank's place and tell him to bring his family down to Fort Dodge until this thing blows over."

At a signal from Sanchez, the cavalrymen left the trail and broke into the timber. An hour's ride through the woods, with sabers and canteens rattling against the brush, brought the platoon to an edge of a clearing where stood a log cabin. As he led the men across the cleared land Lee heard the barking of dogs and the shouting of children about the house.

"Pa! Pa! Here comes the Cavalry! Pa!" shouted a child excitedly.

"Halt!" commanded Lee as he drew the platoon up before the cabin. "And mind you don't trample Mrs. Eubank's corn," he laughed.

"Howdy, Lee," said Eubank coming around the edge of the log cabin, carrying in his hand an ancient percussion musket and a powder horn.

"Hello, Will. I just rode over to tell you that Little Bear's left the reservation again. He's got a big Crazy Dog scalping party on the loose again."

"Him and that damned Cheyenne lance again!" said Eubank. "If you soljer-boys would capture it away from him, Lee, he wouldn't be so unneighborly-like."

Lee laughed easily. "We try, Will; we try."

"You think I ought to move Sarah and her brood down to Dodge? She's on her fourth, you know."

Mrs. Eubank, standing in her big apron in the cabin door, blushed and moved inside again.

"You'd better. Little Bear's got his dander up. He wiped out our supply train from Laramie over on the Trail yesterday afternoon."

"Well, I don't reckon to be in 'fore tomorrow. I got some cattle up on the ridge that'll take a day to round up."

"We're going back now," said Lee. "Do you want Mrs. Eubank and the kids to ride in with us?"

"I reckon not, son. I can take care o' my folks as well as you Yankee soljers can!"

"You know I'm no Yankee at heart, Will," laughed Lee.

"But you got on a blue uniform and a yellow stripe down your breeches."

"Alright, Will," Lee smiled. He led the platoon across the stump land to pick up the trail back to the fort.

The rear scout, riding through the timber far behind the column, watched curiously as a flight of quail passed over him in terror.

"Musta been scared by an old grizzly," he mused.

III

AFTER ANOTHER hour in the saddle, the platoon, with Lee at its head, reached the crest of the hills which overlooked the short plains around Fort Dodge.

"Hold up," commanded Lee as he lifted his arm. He dismounted, and the platoon followed him wearily, sprawling out on the ground. Lee wanted to rest his horse before taking them into Dodge. An officer could lose his commission for winding his mount in Colonel Hanks' command. It was a common joke in the Regiment that the Colonel made and broke men so often that his non-coms put on their chevrons with hooks-and-eyes.

The sun was almost directly above them now, and Lee wiped his wet face with the yellow kerchief tied loosely about his neck. It was hot.

From Fort Dodge, a neat brown box in the distance on the plains, as correct and precise itself as the Regiment which garrisoned it, rose thin trails of smoke from the cooking fires of the noon meal. Lee reflected that in his platoon they hadn't eaten since the night before.

He lay on his stomach with his chin in his hands and watched the Fort. The plains seemed to roll away behind it like the ocean. Beyond, far across the level land, a blue rise in the west marked the beginning of the mountain ranges.

Suddenly from the Fort he saw four horsemen emerge, like dark specks on a sheet of yellow, and fan out across the plains. The dust hung heavily in the air behind them.

"Sergeant!"

Sanchez came up and dropped down on his knees beside the young officer.

"Looks like the Regimental scouts," said the platoon sergeant watching as the four horsemen galloped in their direction.

In a moment the sergeant's observation was verified when, from the gates of the fort, snaked a lengthy blue column surrounded by a haze of dust. Lee watched the column moving across the plain. At the rear two wagons with white canvas coverings moved rapidly to keep up with the cavalry. When the column drew close enough, Lee picked out the Third's yellow guidon riding with a trooper at the head of the regiment. By counting the gaps in the blue line, Lee figured that there were fourteen troops of cavalry in the saddle.

"The colonel has the whole regiment out today except for the station force,"

observed Lee, standing up. "Wonder what has happened?"

"He probably thinks you got cut off by Little Bear."

"No, he wouldn't send a whole regiment to rescue a single platoon," replied Lee. "Mount up!" he called. "Let's go meet them."

Lee led the platoon down from the hills and rode out toward the regiment.

"Sergeant Sanchez! Take the platoon back to join Captain Lonnigan's troop. I'll report to Colonel Hanks."

Lee broke away from his platoon, galloped up before the Regimental CO, and fell in beside him.

"Lt. Dupuy reporting, sir. We reached the wagon train at sun-up this morning. They had been wiped out yesterday afternoon. We recovered the bodies of twelve Negroes and one white officer.

"How many Indians in the scalp party, Mister?" asked the Colonel dully.

"About a hundred and fifty. My scouts found the place where they camped last night but it was hard to say where they were going, sir."

"All right, Mister; rejoin your troop."

Lee started to ask him the Regiment's destination, but thought better of it and spurred his horse off to the rear of the column.

Captain Lonnigan and Lieutenant Braggel were riding side by side at the head of Troop "C."

"Did you see anything, Lee?" asked Lonnigan anxiously.

"The Cheyenne wiped out that supply train yesterday. Why?"

"Why doesn't he hurry!" exploded young Braggel. "We'll never catch them trotting along like this!"

"Mrs. Hanks came to my quarters this morning," explained Lonnigan. "She asked Irish to ride with her up to William Eubank's place to bring back his wife to Fort Dodge, until the Regiment could round up Little Bear and his Crazy Dog Band. At the time it seemed safe enough to me."

"You let your daughter ride out with Mrs. Hanks?" demanded Lee.

"I thought Little Bear would be a hundred miles from here after attacking that supply train. Besides, that half-breed girl who works for the Colonel, Pearl White Feathers, was going to drive the wagon for them."

"Little Bear will be out of the Wyoming Territory with those two women before we can catch up with him!" This was Braggel again.

"Almost an hour ago," continued Lonnigan, "Pearl came back to the Fort alone, and said that Little Bear had captured them before they even got to Eubank's place, but that she had escaped. Little Bear carried off Irish and the Colonel's Lady."

"The Colonel is taking the whole Regiment to get them back," interrupted Braggel.

Lee did not answer, but rode back to join his platoon. When he had told Sanchez, the sergeant only grunted.

"He'll never find Little Bear by using the whole Regiment," he observed. "That sneaky Cheyenne half-breed probably has his scouts up in the hills watching this very minute."

"I know," said Lee. "But the Colonel thinks he can frighten Little Bear with a show of strength. He'd do better by sending just a Troop."

"How is Lt. Braggel taking it about his sweatheart's capture?" questioned Sanchez, who rather liked the young officer himself.

"He wants to go out and fight the whole Cheyenne nation single-handed."

"And the Captain?"

"He's new out here, Sergeant. He doesn't realize what kind of danger his daughter is in. He doesn't know what the Indians do to white women, and I hope that young fool Braggel keeps his mouth shut!"

Sanchez nodded grimly.

FASTENED Legion-style to the back of his cap, the white kerchief which the Colonel wore to keep his neck from sun-blistering fluttered distinctively behind his head as he wheeled his mount away from the four-abreast column of cavalry and stood watching it past.

"Regiment!" his voice floated back faintly to Lee's ears.

"Squadron!" came a second command, louder and closer, which was repeated by other squadron commanders behind him.

"Troop!" bellowed Captain Lonnigan at the head of his command.

The Colonel's voice far at the front of the column followed up his preparatory command with the command of execution: "At a gallop, Ho!"

The regiment instantly became more alive. The troopers urged their horses to a gallop, and the banging of the sabers and metal equipment increased proportionately. Lee could hear the teamsters with their wagons at the rear of the regimental column shouting and driving their mules to keep up.

They covered ground quickly now. After a few minutes the wagons were a couple of hundred yards behind, and by the time the Regiment had broken into the hill country, the two wagons were but faint clouds of dust behind them.

"He won't keep this up much longer," shouted Lee to Sanchez after the column had been moving at the grueling pace for almost an hour. "The Colonel loves his horses too much!" The animals were breaking into a white sweat after being reined in so closely to the column.

"Maybe he loves his wife more," shouted Sanchez. He was thinking of a Trooper in the regiment who'd run his horse to death last fall to bring the word of Captain Fetterman's ambush at Powder River. The Colonel was making the cavalryman pay for his mount out of his 13 dollars a month pay. The trooper had figured it would take him another two years to pay the $132.50 value that was set on the army horse.

The regiment came to an abrupt halt.

As the troopers sat breathing heavily in their saddles, Sanchez reached over and tugged at the sleeve of Lee's blue tunic. He pointed toward a column of black smoke which lifted up from beyond the wooded hills a few miles away to their left.

"Look's like Will Eubank's place," said Lee.

Sanchez nodded.

The drum of hoofbeats of a single horseman galloping down the length of the column came to Lee's ears. The troopers turned in their saddles, eagerly watching the Striker, to see at which Troop he would stop.

The Mexican trooper reined-in at Troop "C."

Lee spurred his horse up to the head of the column where Lonnigan and Braggel waited.

"Colonel Hanks' compliments to Captain Lonnigan, sir, "said the striker. "He ask that you have Lieutenants Braggel, Donahue, and Dupuy report to him at the head of the column."

"Mister Donahue!" called Captain Lonnigan. The old white haired officer spurred his horse up from his platoon at the rear of Troop "C".

"Yes, sir?"

"Report forward to the Colonel," said Lonnigan. He motioned Lee and Braggel forward with a gesture of his hand.

The three officers rode back down the line with the Colonel's Striker while the regiment waited patiently in their saddles. The occasional snorting of a winded horse and the creaking of leather were the only breaks in the stillness.

Colonel Hanks returned their salutes and eyed them coldly.

"Mister Donahue, we've left the burial wagons behind. Leave your platoon under the command of your sergeant, and take personal charge of those two wagons. You will proceed to the point where the supply train from Fort Laramie was attacked, and collect the bodies of those men for burial. Wait at that point for the Regiment. Questions, mister?"

"Yes, sir!" thundered Donahue. "I'm no wagon soldier, Colonel! Why must I be taken away from my platoon to do a job any corporal could take care of?"

Hanks face betrayed nothing of his thoughts.

"I am quite aware, Lieutenant, that you had your own Regiment during the late war, and that you were my Commanding Officer for a brief period. However, so long as you command even a platoon in my Regiment, you will obey my orders. Is that clear?"

Donahue glared back at him for a moment, saluted, and wheeled his horse back down the line.

"Mister Braggel," continued the Colonel, "your platoon will act as escort for Mr. Donahue's wagons.

"Mister Dupuy, on your patrol this morning did you approach any settler's cabins?"

"The William Eubank's place, sir."

"Would you say, mister, that the smoke

over there on my left is the approximate location of this settler's cabin?"

"I would, sir,"

"Then take your platoon, Mister, and investigate that smoke. Engage the savages if they are about. The Regiment will follow behind you shortly, but not too close to frighten the Cheyenne. Questions?"

"No, sir."

As Lee rode back to rejoin his platoon, he saw the Colonel staring motionless at the column of smoke.

"At a gallop! Forward—Ho!" Commanded Lee.

The platoon wheeled out of the column behind him and followed. As they rode up the crest of a hill beside the trail, Lee paused, and whipped the platoon past him with his riding quirt. The regiment was still waiting quietly where they had left them, and at the rear of the blue column Braggel's platoon was galloping off in a cloud of dust behind Donahue to meet the two burial wagons.

Lee slipped his Spencer carbine out of his saddle boot and snapped it on his belt. It was more uncomfortable riding that way, but he wanted the weapon where it was most accessible. He put three scouts forward and one on each flank. Being the bait, he reflected, didn't necessarily mean being expendable material.

At the last ridge, after hard riding, the scouts on the forward point called a halt to the platoon, and Lee rode up front to have a look. Across the stump land the Eubank's cabin was a mass of still burning ruins.

"What do you think?" Lee asked a scout.

"They just cleared out of there a minute ago, Lieutenant, and they knew we were coming. See that track?" He pointed to a fresh hoof print of an unshod Indian pony into which the sand was still sifting.

His gaze followed the direction of the track, and Lee noticed, at the edge of the path, a bush which was gently rocking although the air was still.

"He's probably sitting up there right now watching us," Lee said. He didn't like the looks of it. "Sanchez!" He called.

The platoon sergeant, with the butt of his Spencer resting on his hip and the muzzle in the air, rode up.

"They're all around us, Lieutenant. You can't see them, but you can feel them."

"I know, but we're going in. Have the men carry their carbines at a half-cock."

Lee waited until the platoon came up to him, then, pointing forward, he led them down at a fast gallop.

"Keep your eyes open," he yelled.

The cavalry raced across the stump land, pulled up sharply before the burning cabin, and Lee leaped from his saddle.

"Sanchez!" he screamed. "Two men out behind us! Two ahead of us. Get a man up on both of those ridges there. I want cover all around!"

The platoon sergeant barked his orders sharply, designating men, and putting out the scouts.

Knowing well that the non-com would take all the necessary precautions, Lee turned his attention toward the burning cabin. There was a strange quietness about it, marred only by the crackling of the logs or a collapse of wood when it burned out.

He found Will Eubank lying under a dead Cheyenne, with several arrows in his body. He had been stripped of his clothing, scalped, and his beard hacked off.

Two of the Eubank children had been swung by their heels and brained against the wall of the cabin, but the oldest child, a girl who had been unfortunate enough to wear long blond hair, had been scalped.

Mrs. Eubank's body had been dragged away from the cabin site to the edge of the field. Evidently she had been captured alive.

"Sergeant Sanchez. Better organize a burial squad. The Eubanks would want to remain right here on their own land," said Lee wearily. He took a blanket from his saddle roll and wrapped Mrs. Eubank's body before bringing it back before his troopers.

"Little Bear has gone crazy, Lieutenant! He never raided this close to Fort Dodge before," said Sanchez.

"He's awfully sure that Cheyenne lance will keep his tribe safe."

The rustling noise made by the wind blowing through the pine trees surrounding the clearing was interrupted by a shout from a scout posted not far from

the cabin. Lee looked curiously at Sanchez, cocked his Spencer carbine, and walked over to where the scout stood.

Sprawled on a thick brown carpet of pine needles, they saw a sixth stripped and mutilated body.

It was the Colonel's lady, Mary Hanks.

IV

"COVER THAT UP," ordered Lee. The scout brought up a blanket from his saddle and tied it around the body. When they turned back to the burning cabin another trooper approached Lee.

"Lieutenant, that ridge up there is alive with Cheyenne. I could hear them crawling in the brush around me, and their horses were pretty noisy."

"Will they attack us?" said a trooper standing in a trench behind Lee.

Lee turned around and found that the question came from Cooke, who was busy shoveling a grave for the Eubanks.

"Yes, they'll attack all right. This place won't be so healthy for us in a few minutes. We'll have to fight on foot and the Cheyenne will have the advantage of firing from the ridge."

"Can't we get out of here?" persisted Cooke.

"Our orders were to engage the Indians if they were around!" interrupted Sanchez. His face betrayed his unexpressed contempt for Cooke.

"I want a man to take a message back to Colonel Hanks."

"I'll go!" said Cooke dropping his shovel.

"The Cheyenne may have gone around behind us and cut off the trail by now. You may not be any safer there than we are here!" sneered Sanchez.

Cooke whitened.

"Tell Colonel Hanks what we found here, and that the Cheyenne are going to attack us. Tell the Colonel that we have recovered the body of his wife."

The trooper shot a startled glance at the bundle on the ground. He took a step toward it, paused, then went to mount his horse.

"That all, sir?"

"Yes. Get going."

Cooke spurred the mount fast across the stump land and in a minute was out of sight among the pines.

"He was damned eager to get out of a fight, Lieutenant," said Sanchez bitterly.

"Some one had to go, Sergeant."

Cooke got away safely down the trail.

The sound of the hoofbeats of his horse had just died away over the ridge when from the timber in the opposite direction broke a fusillade of shots. Lee turned quickly and saw a thin line of blue-white smoke hanging about the edge of the woods.

"Here they come!" screamed Sanchez. "Get down!"

"As skirmishers!" commanded Lee, pulling his saber and directing his troopers up on a firing line. A few of the Spencers carbines were already returning the Cheyenne fire in short, sharp barks.

"Sanchez!" called Lee. "Get a skirmish line at our rear!"

A dozen troopers fell back to protect the platoon's rear and flanks. Lee felt more secure once he heard Sanchez directing the firing of a line of kneeling and prone troopers on the other side of the burning cabin.

He could see in the trees at the edge of the wood the Cheyenne slipping about like shadows and firing off their single-shot muskets. A few of the braves had crept in across the stump land and were using the protecting cover of the cut tree trunks to snipe at close range. The clearing was a din of barking Spencers and exploding muskets.

After a few minutes a group of mounted braves appeared at the edge of the wood to tempt the cavalrymen to fire in volleys.

"You're in for a cold shock, Little Bear," thought Lee to himself. "At Powder River we had only the old single-shot Springfields. You've never seen a seven-shot Spencer carbine, have you?"

"Lieutenant," interrupted Sanchez. "The platoon only has fourteen cartridges per carbine. The men didn't get a chance to load up their bandoleers when we failed to meet the supply train from Laramie."

"I know," said Lee. "We'll just have to fight a holding action until Cooke can get to Colonel Hanks."

The mounted braves were running their horses up and down at the edge of the clearing.

"Now," shouted Lee, "In volleys,

FIRE!"

The carbines rattled off a line of fire and were silent. Thinking that the soldiers would have to stop and reload their weapons, the Cheyenne braves came pouring out of the woods like water over a broken dike.

"Hold your fire until I say!" shouted Lee.

He could see Little Bear at the head of the Cheyenne, astride an Indian pony, brandishing his steel lance and shouting. The Indians came howling across the stump land, mounted and on foot, yelling and firing their muskets.

"Now, FIRE!" commanded Lee.

Another sheet of red barked from the Spencers, and in the charging Cheyenne band a dozen braves leading the attack stumbled and fell. Little Bear's pony reared up on its hind legs, and the half-breed war chief had a hard time reorganizing his attack. In a moment he had the Indians remassed and screaming and charging again.

"Fire," shouted Lee a third time, and a fourth, and a fifth time, and the ranks of the Cheyenne wavered, thinned, and at last broke. The white smoke and the smell of gun powder hung heavily over the clearing.

A corporal with a musket ball in his neck crawled away from the skirmish line.

"I'm almost out of cartridges," called a trooper as he pulled out his revolver.

"Me too!" shouted one of his saddle mates.

"Shut up," commanded Lee. "That half-breed speaks English." He looked toward the stump land where the Cheyenne were dragging their wounded into the woods. Little Bear was still mounted on his pony, directing his braves with his glistening lance. From the trees the Indians kept up a glistering fire from their muskets, and some braves worked in close to rain arrows down on the line of blue coats about the burning cabin.

"How many did we lose, Sergeant?" asked Lee to Sanchez, who was trying to stop the blood from the wounded corporal.

"This man with a ball in his throat, sir, and two dead. But we can't break up another charge like that one."

"I know," Lee replied. Then, to the troopers he called. "The regiment will be here in a few minutes, so hold your fire until you're sure of a target."

Occasionally the bark of a cavalry carbine replied to the steady sputtering of the Cheyenne muskets. Lead balls smacked dully into the logs about the troopers, and kicked up dirt in their faces. The cavalrymen carefully watched the feathered arrows as they arched gently up from the pine woods and dropped down on the blue line.

Suddenly, the Cheyenne firing ceased, and the troopers began to mutter among themselves.

"What the hell, sir?" asked Sanchez.

As if in reply, a voice shouted from the edge of the woods: "Coats-of-blue, hear me! Your brothers the buffalo soldiers are dead at the hands of the Crazy Dogs. Their horses killed and their rolling tepees burned. You have seen them, and you have seen yourselves as you will be.

"Already your muskets are hungry for powder. Your lead is gone. I know these things to be because I have heard you crying among yourselves like the women of my lodges. Hear me, coats-of-blue!"

"Fire a volley," whispered Lee.

A ragged discharge of carbines exploded anew in the clearing, and was met by silence from the woods. Lee, rising to his knees, cupped his hands to his mouth and called, "Listen, O Little Bear! Are the coat's-of-blue muskets hungry now for powder? Ask of the brave Cheyenne who lie dead on the field if the coats-of-blue muskets hungry now for Ask your Dog Soldiers to follow you again, O Little Bear, and count for yourself how many warriors will ride to the happy hunting ground this hour! Little Bear is not a warrior! He is a squaw-man fit only for the women's lodges. He who lifts the scalps of squaws!"

"Ayee!" screamed the half-breed in a rage. He dashed out of the woods on his pony with lance in hand, stood in the clearing in easy range of the cavalry soldiers, and calmly fired a shot from his musket at them. A trooper's Spencer barked a reply at him, but the shot went wild into the trees as the Indian disappeared again.

"LITTLE BEAR!" shouted Lee again. "Hear me, O squaw-chief! The woman which you have this day captured

is the squaw of a powerful chief of the coats-of-blue. Surrender her, Little Bear, and take your people back to your reservation, and become once again the great leader of Cheyenne that you were. Surrender her, Little Bear, or from this day forward suffer! The coats-of-blue will drive you from the plains into the mountains of Canada, and the Cheyenne will die of the cold and starvation, and his people will say of Little Bear that he was a lustful and foolish chief to bring this misery on them!"

Immediately a sputtering of musketry broke from the timber and again the Indians swarmed out of the woods for another attack. Lee could see Little Bear, stripped naked now, screaming and working himself into a frenzy as he drove his braves into the attack.

"Hold your fire," warned Lee.

The Indians, charging in mass, were only two hundred yards away now, and a nervous trooper discharged his Spencer.

"Hold until I say!" commanded Lee tensely. He slipped his revolver from his holster and cocked it in his belt. "Now. Don't let them inside the perimeter. FIRE!"

A dozen braves went down, and Little Bear's horse stumbled and threw him to the ground, but he quickly caught another and mounted. The Indians charged the last distance which separated them from the blue line.

"Fire!" shouted Lee again, but the savages were already on top of them and the volley lost its effectiveness. Little Bear leaped his pony inside the broken defenses and ran his lance through the corporal who had been wounded in the first charge. The troopers met the Cheyenne in hand to hand duels, sabers against tomahawks, pistols against war clubs and lances. Here and there a carbine fired its final shot and its owner dug at his side for his saber.

Lee, kneeling beside the burning cabin, shot a brave from his pony and kept trying to bring his pistol down on Little Bear, who was a frenzy of action in the midst of the fighting—shouting, stabbing, hacking, jabbing, and screaming from his horse. A Cheyenne on foot attempted to rush the officer with upraised tomahawk, but Lee side-stepped and dropped the savage with a back hand stroke of his blade into the painted face.

Lee was carefully counting the shots from his pistol.

Save the last one.

Suddenly, from the distance came the clear notes of the bugle blowing the cavalry charge, and for a brief instant the fighting in the clearing stopped, while troopers and Indians alike listened.

Then Little Bear gave a cry, and the Cheyenne braves went running back into the woods from where they had come. Lee killed another warrior who stopped to lift the scalp of a wounded trooper, but by the time the first scouts appeared over the top of the ridge the clearing was vacant of living Cheyenne.

"Here comes the Third!" cried a trooper, and a general shout went up from Lee's weary platoon. Troop after troop of cavalry galloped by and on into the timber in pursuit of the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers. Colonel Hanks' party stopped by the remains of the cabin.

"Lt. Dupuy!" he called from his horse.

"Yes, sir!"

"How many men did you lose, Mister?"

"Five killed, sir. Everyone got rustled up a bit. The Cheyenne broke through our perimeter defense. We were about finished when the Regiment got here."

"Little Bear?"

"Yes, sir. He's pretty bold, Colonel. There were about three hundred of them. Another band must have left the reservation to join him."

"They did, Mister. The regimental scouts found the trail of another Cheyenne party. I was afraid they'd try to join Little Bear."

He's still got Captain Lonnigan's daughter, sir."

"I know, Mister. He's probably sent her back to old chief American Dog. The scouts know the location of his camp back on the reservation, but Little Bear would never let us take her by force."

"No, sir."

"Well, mister, get your wounded on their horses. We'll go back to Fort Dodge."

"Bury the Eubanks here, sir?"

"Yes," said the officer coldly, "and we'll take the body of Mrs. Hanks back with us."

"Yes, sir," replied Lee, with carefully

averted eyes.

"Where is that trooper you sent to me?" asked the Colonel, as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"Cooke!" summoned Dupuy.

The soldier came up behind Depuy and saluted.

"I want you to take a message to Lieutenants Donahue and Braggel, over on the Bozeman Trail where the supply wagons were attacked yesterday," said the Colonel.

"I've run my mount pretty hard, sir, when I reported to you," said Cooke dully.

Hanks gave him a freezing glare.

"You will tell them that the Regiment is returning to Fort Dodge, and that they are to follow with the burial wagons as soon as possible. I don't want them out there alone since Little Bear has gone wild."

"Wouldn't it be better, sir, to send a troop to escort them in?" replied Cooke.

Dupuy knew what was coming, and attempted to focus his attention back on his platoon.

"Lieutenant," said Hanks sharply. "I want you to hear this." Dupuy turned back to face the Colonel.

"Cooke," said Hanks, ignoring Dupuy. "I order you to take that message to the burial wagons, and should you refuse, I'll have you court martialed for cowardice in the face of the enemy. Do you understand that?"

Cooke looked helplessly at Dupuy, then mounted his horse.

"That all, Colonel Hanks?"

"That is all, Trooper," said the Colonel as he returned his salute. He didn't turn to look as Cooke galloped out of the clearing.

"Mister Dupuy," he said. "Instruct the bugler to sound recall. We'll never capture that slippery half-breed devil by force."

V

NIGHT FELL over Fort Dodge like a sober dark canopy. The music and laughter which had been so prevalent in the enlisted barracks only the night before had been considerably lessened with the coming of a new Indian campaign.

In the Regimental Headquarters, adjacent to Colonel Hanks' quarters, a light burned brightly. Inside the plainly furnished room the officers of the regiment sat stiffly with sabers straight at their sides listening to the Commandant as he outlined on a large wall marked "Territory of Wyoming" the movements of the Cheyenne war party.

"In brief, gentlemen, this is it," said Colonel Hanks pointing with a cane reed. "Little Bear's band of Crazy Dogs is small and mobile enough to keep one jump ahead of us if we use the Regiment as a compact unit. And he'll never fight where he doesn't outnumber us five to one."

Lee, seated on a slab bench in the rear of the room, stretched his long legs before him and regarded his dusty boots with a bored disinterest.

Where are Donahue and Braggel?

He cleared his throat and listened to the dull droning of Hanks' voice.

For a man who just this day lost his beloved wife to the Indians, you seem damned composed, Colonel.

"Always bear in mind that while Little Bear is an uneducated savage, he is still a brilliant strategist."

You West Pointers all play at war like it was a checker game. Human life doesn't mean much to you as long as you win your battles and get your glory.

"A lack of education is not stupidity, gentlemen. Also remember that Little Bear is half white-man—as white as any one of us, and half Cheyenne. His mother was a frontier woman captured from a wagon train passing through here long before Fort Dodge was founded. His father was then a chief of the Cheyenne."

How does this help to get back Irish Lonnigan? And what good does it do to bring all this up before Captain Lonnigan? Why tell him what's in store for his daughter?

"When we tried using the Regiment against him he out-maneuvered us. When we tried to trap him with a single platoon, he stole the bait, nearly wiped out the platoon, and got away. Now we'll have to fight his way—with cunning and diplomacy."

You seem about as diplomatic, Colonel, as a herd of bull buffalo in a thunder storm. If you had any brains you'd lay a whip across the pretty brown back of your Indian girl friend for taking those two women outside the stockade this morning.

She's Cheyenne herself, and it was you who said you couldn't trust a Cheyenne—even a half-breed Cheyenne.

"What I had in mind was sending a messenger to the old chief, American Dog, granting permission to those of his braves who want to leave the reservation to join the Southern Cheyenne on the war path in Colorado.

"In return for letting them leave the Territory, the messenger will tell American Dog that the white girl, Captain Lonnigan's daughter, must be returned to us, and, secondly, the braves who want to leave the Reservation must follow a route marked by the soldiers. We'll trap them in one of those box canyons south of here and break the backbone of the Cheyenne's power once and for all. Little Bear will be suspicious, but old American Dog trusts us, and he's their chief!"

How noble, Colonel.

"Colonel Hanks," interrupted Captain Lonnigan rising to his feet. "I'm anxious to have my daughter safely returned but I'd hesitate to risk the lives of more men unnecessarily."

"Soldiers know the risks when they enlist in this Regiment, Captain."

"Just the same, sir, if we could send word to American Dog by one of their own people—perhaps that Cheyenne serving girl who is employed in your quarters," suggested Lonnigan.

Lee smiled. You smacked him with both barrels that time.

"I could not consider sending a woman to do a soldier's duty, sir," said Hanks stiffly.

"I suppose not, sir," replied the Irishman innocently.

"I believe that Lt. Donahue would be right for the job. He directed the commission that went to sign the Treaty with American Dog last year after the Powder River campaign. I think that Lt. Dupuy was also a number of that party," said Hanks. Then, raising his voice, "Is that right, Lieutenant?"

Lee bolted upright on the bench.

"Yes sir."

"By the way, Lieutenant, where is Lieutenant Donahue? When I sound Officer's Call in this regiment I mean to have all my officers present whether they've just come off duty or not!"

"He hasn't come off duty, sir. He and Lt. Braggel haven't come in with the burial wagons detail," replied Lee.

Hanks looked puzzled, then startled.

"They should have come in hours ago," he said. "Juarez!"

"Yes, sir," replied the Striker, standing up at the rear of the room.

"Go to Troop "C" barracks and have Trooper Cooke report to me immediately."

"Yes, sir!" His boots sounded heavily across the wood planks as he ran out.

I wondered when you'd get around to missing them, Colonel. It's slow traveling with those two wagons, and you'd better send a troop to escort them in.

Colonel Hanks, feeling that he had blundered before his command, stood silently waiting in front of the officers of the regiment.

IN A FEW minutes the Mexican Striker returned with Cooke.

Cooke stepped into the room, glanced about him suspiciously at the officers, and saluted Colonel Hanks silently.

"Is that the way you report to an officer, soldier?" snapped Hanks, with hands clasped behind him.

"No, sir."

Lee was embarrassed for the man, and somewhere in the room another officer coughed nervously.

"Well?" demanded Hanks, his feet planted far apart, his head thrust forward. In raging at Cooke he thereby relieved some of his own embarrassment concerning the burial wagons.

"Private Cooke reports to the Commanding Officer as directed, sir," said Cooke aggressively.

Hanks returned his salute smartly. "That's better," he growled. "Which officer did you report to at the burial wagons today?"

"Lt. Donahue, sir," said Cooke blandly.

"What did he say?"

"He said he would start as soon as . . . as soon as the burial wagons were loaded."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see any signs of the Cheyenne?"

Cooke paused. "Yes, sir. A big scalp party. They were carrying their wounded from the battle at the cabin. I hid in a

timber coppice and watched them ride over a hill."

"In front of you?"

Again Cooke stumbled. "No, sir. Just near me. On my left flank."

"Before you reported to Lt. Donahue?" glared Hanks.

"Yes, sir," mumbled Cooke.

"Speak up, damn it!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And you reported to Donahue that the Cheyenne were moving in his direction?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He ordered out scouts."

"How is it that you didn't stay with that detail instead of coming back to the Fort alone, especially when you knew that there were Indians about?"

"I didn't think of it, sir. I delivered my message and came back."

Hanks glared at the trooper. "Mister Dupuy," said the Colonel coldly, without taking his eyes from Cooke. "Fall out your platoon and ride out to meet the two wagons."

That's right, Colonel. Give the dirty work to my troopers. They've only been in their saddles since last night.

"Yes, sir," said Lee aloud. He saluted and stepped outside. The night was bright and warm and clear. He could see the yellow lights burning in windows all over the post.

Suddenly from the stockade a voice sang out hoarsely: "Corporal of the Guard! Main Gate!"

Two shots from a Spencer cut the night and echoed over the post.

"Corporal of the Guard! Main gate!"

The cry was repeated from post to post, and from the direction of the stockade gate Lee could hear excited voices.

A number of officers led by the Colonel himself appeared in the doorway of Regimental Headquarters and peered out curiously. Lee heard the creaking of the big woden gate as it opened, and the sound of a group of horsemen riding into the stockade.

"Just a minute, Lieutenant," called Hanks. "I believe that must be the burial wagons coming in now."

With a clattering of hoofs the horsemen cut sharply around the enlisted barracks and reined-up before Regimental. Lee saw that it was Don Braggel who was leading the men.

"Colonel Hanks!" called Braggel breathlessly. "Cheyenne jumped us!"

Hanks pounded his fist against the walls of the building and charged out of the doorway with an oath.

"Where, Mister? Speak up!"

"Hell's Basin, sir," breathed Braggel heavily. "Same place. Lost Lt. Donahue!"

"How many men?"

"Just us left, sir. We hid out until night fall before coming on in."

Hanks counted the horsemen. "Twelve!" he said. "Twelve out of thirty-two."

Lee helped Braggel down from his horse. His yellow kerchief was stained a bright red from a cut on his forehead.

"Alright, you men," bellowed Hanks. "You're dismissed! Report over to the infirmary if any of you are hurt."

The troopers began leading their mounts across the parade field. Lee helped support Braggel into the light of the Regimental Headquarters.

"Juarez, bring a doctor from the infirmary for the Lieutenant," directed Hanks.

Braggel was propped up against the wall while someone unbuttoned his tunic. He looked extremely young with his hair matted about his forehead.

"Alright, Mister," said Hanks, "Let me have your report."

Braggel took a drink of brandy from a flask which someone had handed him and licked his lips. The regimental surgeon pushed his way through the group of officers and looked at the cut on the boy's forehead.

"Well, sir," began Braggel. "We got the two wagons loaded and we waited. In the middle of the afternoon (Ouch! That hurts!) one of my flank scouts came in and said that a big party of Cheyenne were heading toward us. Lt. Donahue was afraid we wouldn't have time to get out of the basin before the Indians got there so we pulled up the wagons in a perimeter defense and waited for the Regiment to come back for us. (Take it easy, doctor! That cut burns!) We waited all afternoon in the hot sun. The scouts kept seeing signs of the Indians above us along the rim of the basin, but we weren't attacked.

"About four o'clock we decided to make a run for it to high ground. We split the platoon, and I took half of it with the first wagon, and Donahue, Lt. Donahue, sir, took the rest with his wagon. They came down on top of us as soon as we broke the perimeter—about three hundred of them.

"They cut off the second wagon from us, sir, and started circling around and around, and the troopers dismounted and fought on foot. We ran our wagon into the pines at the top of the basin and spread out to defend ourselves but they didn't rush us.

"They began circling around and around the other wagon, and shooting, and the troopers were shooting back in volleys, and after a few minutes the Spencers weren't shooting back as often. The Cheyenne tightened their circle and rode in among them, and they captured five or six of the soldiers—I think Lt. Donahue was one of them, sir. They tied them on the wagon wheels and we could hear them screaming. It was awful, sir!"

"All right, mister."

"When it got dark we led our horses through the pines and got away. I suppose the Indians have found our other wagon by now."

"Why didn't you leave the place as soon as you had loaded your wagons, Lieutenant?"

"Your orders were to wait there for the return of the Regiment, sir."

Hanks grabbed the surgeon's hand as he was bandaging Braggel's head.

"What about the messenger I sent you?" he demanded.

"He must have been caught by the Indians, sir."

Hanks stood and stared at Cooke. The trooper stood with his back to the wall, his face pale, his lips set in a thin line.

"No," replied Hanks coldly. "The Indians didn't get him. He'd been better off if they had!"

Cooke didn't answer.

"The messenger saw the Indian party heading in your direction, Lieutenant, and he thought the wagons would be wiped out anyway so why should he risk his neck?"

Cooke smiled faintly.

"Juarez! Go get the officer of the guard," ordered the Colonel. "I have a prisoner for him."

The room was silent.

"Trooper," said Hanks spacing his words evenly, his eyes burning at Cooke, "I'm going to have you shot."

VI

LEE RODE straight down the narrow trail looking neither to his right nor his left, walking his horse, and watching his shadow gliding along beneath him.

What else could you do but come? Donahue is dead—eagle spread and burned on a wagon wheel. He couldn't come, and someone had to do it. 'I'll go, Colonel; I was a member of Lt. Donahue's commission that went to American Dog last year. He knows me. I might get through to him, sir.' What else could you do? Lonnigan looked as if he'd hug your neck.

With the mid-day sun burning down on him, Lee mopped his wet forehead with the yellow kerchief about his neck, and looked up at the smoke which arose from the camp fires on the reservation just over the hill.

A single shot echoed out of the pines and crashed into the rocks a few feet ahead of his horse. Lee didn't stop.

Keep riding. He's only testing. Keep riding. Don't appear to notice it.

Presently an Indian chieftain rode out of the woods ahead of him; then, was followed by a line of mounted horsemen. The Cheyenne stood silently in the trail waiting.

Dressed in only a bright breech cloth, with a Spencer Carbine captured from one of Lt. Donahue's men slung across the blanket saddle in front of him, a huge blue-eyed Indian held up his arm and blocked Lee's way.

In his hand the Cheyenne held a glistening 16th Century Spanish lance. It was the rebel war chief, Little Bear.

Lee stopped his horse before the savages. They stood staring at him belligerently.

"Peace, brothers," said Lee lifting his right hand. "I bring word to American Dog, the great Cheyenne Chief."

The Indians regarded him in stony silence.

After a minute Little Bear said, without

changing expression, "The coat-of-blue comes whispering peace to his brothers but wears his pistol forward."

He grunted a command in Cheyenne to three braves who rode forward and snatched Lee's pistol and saber from him. He had left his carbine behind to keep it from falling into Little Bear's hands.

Easy. Easy now. Don't change expression. You're dead if he sees you're scared. Let them have the pistol. You still got your Derringer in your boot.

"Gladly I surrender my arms to my Cheyenne brothers so that they may know I come to them as a friend with words which the Crazy Dog Society have long awaited."

"The Coat-of-Blue has presents for the Cheyenne?"

"The Cheyenne are not squaws or children. They do not need presents like Crows. The gift which the coat-of-blue brings is in his words for American Dog!"

Little Bear went into a rapid conversation with his braves while Lee pretended to wait impatiently.

Too bad you don't understand Cheyenne. You can't ever tell what these monkeys are up to—not by their faces. Their expressions never change. You could cut one's leg off and his face would never tell you what he was thinking.

Suddenly Little Bear swung his heavy lance around in a wide circle, catching Lee in the back of the neck and sending him tumbling out of his saddle. Two braves hurled themselves on him before he had recovered from the blow and lashed his wrists together behind him.

One of the Cheyenne warriors stooped down and pulled off Lee's heavy cavalry boots, and the tiny Derringer tumbled out. The warrior picked up the pistol, examined it suspiciously, then struck Lee across the face with his riding quirt.

Little Bear tossed a lariat down over the young officer's neck and jerked him roughly to his feet.

"Go!" commanded the savage.

Almost an hour later, having run, stumbled, and been dragged with feet bloody and bruised behind the Indian ponies over the rocky trail, Lee found himself in the camp of American Dog, surrounded by hundreds of restless Cheyenne. Little Bear broke the horses into a gallop once inside the camp, and Lee was dragged half-unconscious in a cloud of dust past several skin lodges while the squaws ran out screaming to kick at him and throw stones.

As he was half-carried, half-dragged into a lodge, Lee was struck by the heavy odor of animal fat and sweating human bodies which came from inside. American Dog, the old Cheyenne chief, sat on a pile of skins surrounded by a group of his painted braves.

Lee was pitched forward into the dust at the old chief's feet. He could barely make out the forms crowding in about him, and he heard the Indians in the room speaking in Cheyenne, and above the other he could distinguish the clear, familiar voice of a woman talking to the old chief.

His head cleared as quickly as a plunge into cold water, Lee looked up.

The colonel's house girl—Pearl White Feathers! Of course!

Lee looked at the Indian girl.

In an unfettered, free manner, she was attractive enough. Her eyes, mere shafts of light, had a way of darting about in contempt.

"Behold him, old chief," said the half-breed girl, for Lee's benefit, in English. "It is as I have told you. The chief of the coats-of-blue sends one of his warriors with a false message. He speaks with a forked tongue, as a snake! If you listen to his words Cheyenne will die. Heed the counsel of my brother, Little Bear the war chief, and we will slay many of the coats-of-blue. Are the Cheyenne to become rabbits to flee before the falcons? Are the Cheyenne without pride to bear the insults of the whites as do the cowardly Crows?"

American Dog looked at Lee solemnly.

"I know this warrior," he said. "We have met on the field of blood, and have smoked together the pipe of peace in the lodges. He is a brave man and a friend of the Cheyenne."

Three cheers for American Dog! He remembers you from Powder River.

"Listen to him! Listen to him O Chief! Hear his words. Hear the message he brings and see that it is as I have told you!"

Good work, Pearl. Wouldn't the Colonel like to know that his little Indian

playmate was telling his plans to the Cheyenne as fast as he made them! And you must have had a time getting him to talk, old girl. Fort Laramie would like to hear about that. They'd Court Martial old Matt so fast he wouldn't know what hit him!

American Dog motioned to a brave to free Lee's hands, and sat back and waited for him to speak.

"It is not as this squaw says, O brave American Dog. In your lodges there are greedy braves who would take the power of the Cheyenne from you. The council of your war chief will leave the war trail slick with the wet blood of Cheyenne. Do not listen to them, O Chief. They will bring your tribe misery and hunger, not glory or scalps!"

PEARL SCREAMED an abuse at Lee, and scooping up a handful of dust, threw it into his eyes. American Dog watched without expression and listened as the girl broke into an excited Cheyenne. In a moment he waved her silent with a motion of his hand and indicated that Lee would continue.

"What words does the Chief of the coats-of-blue send to the Cheyenne?" he asked.

"He sends to his brothers a message of peace and bids me tell American Dog, the great chief, that the white girl prisoner must be surrendered."

Here Pearl translated something to the Cheyenne braves who muttered angrily among themselves.

"He sends word to Aemrican Dog that those of the Crazy Dog Society who want to join their brothers in the lands to the south may leave their reservation unopposed by the coats-of-blue . . . if they travel the trail to the west through the canyon which the Cheyenne call 'Broken Arrow'."

"Lies!" screamed Pearl. "Is it not as I have said, wise American Dog? This one speaks with a forked tongue. From the lips of his own chief have I heard the true words. The coats-of-blue wait there in ambush to slay the Cheyenne!"

Little Bear, who had been standing quietly at the side of the old man, touched his arm and spoke in a rapid Cheyenne, gesturing, as he talked, with a downward motion of his fingers.

American Dog replied to him in Cheyenne, and the war chief picked up his Spencer carbine and strode out of the lodge.

"There is dissension in my tribe," said American Dog in his broken English. "I have sent the warrior Little Bear to see who has spoken the true words — this squaw or this coat-of-blue. Until he returns the coat-of-blue will stay here."

American Dog, turning away from Lee, indicated that the interview was over. Several Cheyenne braves seized Lee, bound his hands again and pushed him out into the blinding sunlight. A crowd of children and squaws who had been waiting rushed at him with whips and stones, and he protected his face with his arms until his captors could take him inside a second lodge near by. The braves kept the squaws back while they tied Lee's hands above his head to a wooden shaft which ran along the ceiling of the hut. He was conscious of another figure tied up behind him, but did not turn around until the braves had gone out of the lodge and secured a hide covering over the entrance behind them.

He turned in the darkness and peered at the second figure in the hut. Probably some poor Crow they picked up to give the fire treatment, he figured.

"You speak English?" said Lee.

There was a pause, and a woman's voice replied, "Have you come to rescue me, please?"

"Miss Lonnigan? Miss Irish? Is that you? This is Lt. Dupuy from the fort. Can you see me?"

"Yes. I can see you. Have you come for me, or have they captured you, sir? How is my father?"

"He's fine, Miss. I saw him before I left this morning and he says to tell you that the Regiment is doing everything possible to get you back home. I've come to bargain with American Dog. Have they harmed you?"

The girl was making a sobbing noise, and Lee waited for her to speak.

"The old chief has kept the men away from me. The women are terrible, though," she said.

"The squaws are always the worst."

"I know. It was that Cheyenne girl who works for Colonel Hanks that gave us to the Indians. They were waiting in the

woods, and she drove the wagon right up to them."

"Pearl White Feathers. She was with the old chief just now."

"Pearl. Yes, that's the one. The pretty girl. She tricked us, and the Indians took us away with them. Once they tied us up so we couldn't cry out when some cavalry rode by very close to where we were hiding. Near a cabin."

"That was my platoon. We'd just left the Eubank's place and were on our way back to Dodge."

"Afterwards they attacked the log cabin. They made us wait on a ridge while the braves went creeping up. There were some children playing in the yard with a dog, and a man working in the garden beside the house."

"That was Will."

"The Indians slipped in close, and then they went charging down on the man, shooting their guns, and the man killed one of them before he fell down. Then their leader stuck him with his lance, and they all rode around and shot arrows into him."

"Why did they kill Mrs. Hanks?" asked Lee.

"When the shooting was over the Indians took us down to the cabin, and there were those poor little children—"

"I know."

"And the mother was crying and screaming, and they started to drag her off into the field, and Mrs. Hanks—the Colonel's lady—made her horse jump forward and rode over to where they held her. She struck and beat at them until the leader pulled her off her horse, and I shut my eyes and wouldn't listen, and they did those awful things. . . ."

She was silent again. Lee knew she was crying.

So it was Little Bear. You'll hang for that, you half-breed savage.

"It'll all be over soon. You won't have to think about it. In a few days we'll be safely back at Dodge."

Fat chance of that. When Little Bear comes back and tells the old chief that you tried to waltz him into an ambush, he'll roast you and the girl both. And if the Regiment tried to take this place by frontal assault, the Cheyenne would simply pull out and leave you behind with a tomahawk in your skull.

In a few minutes the hide covering the entrance was lifted and Pearl White Feathers slipped in. Lee eyed her coldly.

The Indian girl removed a sharpened cane reed from her belt and jabbed Lee in the side.

He flinched, and the wire of pain penetrated to the very pit of his stomach. He clamped his teeth tightly together.

"What is she going to do, Lieutenant?" asked Irish Lonnigan anxiously from behind him. Lee didn't answer.

"Soldier!" said Pearl. "Brave soldier! Kill many Cheyenne, yes? Brave warrior? Brave yes?" She jabbed Lee with the pointed reed.

Lee kept turning in an attempt to keep away from her, and she followed him around stabbing at him with short thrusts.

In a minute he stopped twisting and hung by his wrists and took it until he fainted.

VII

AT DAWN the next morning a shouting in the Cheyenne camp announced the return of Little Bear's scouting party. Lee, who had been dozing fitfully on his bruised feet, awakened with a start and turned to face Irish Lonnigan. She was standing patiently behind him.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you all right? I was afraid that horrible girl would kill you."

"I only passed out."

"What is all that noise outside?"

"Little Bear has probably returned from Broken Arrow Canyon. Colonel Hanks tried to lure the Cheyenne into a trap there, and Little Bear went to scout ahead. He's a foxy bird. If some of his Dog Soldiers can engage the Regiment at Broken Arrow, the rest of the Cheyenne can slip through the East Passage. Colonel Hanks doesn't have enough troops to hold both passages."

"What will American Dog do when he finds out the Colonel tried to trick him?"

Lee didn't answer.

"Us?" questioned Irish Lonnigan. She was a very brave girl.

"I'm afraid so," replied Lee.

"I was going to be married soon."

"I know. It might help to talk about it. Take your mind off things."

"No. It won't help. Nothing will help. How will they do it?"

"I don't know," lied Lee.

"I hope I can be brave," said Irish. "Don't think about it, Miss."

She tried not to but it was no good for her.

After a while Lee became accustomed to the noise in the camp, and a group of Indians appeared before the lodge in which their two prisoners were being held. Lee waited uneasily for them to enter, and the sweat ran cold down his sides.

American Dog stepped into the lodge, followed by Little Bear and several of his braves. Dressed in a full eagle-feather war bonnet which dragged in the dust behind him, the old chief was magnificent. He looked coldly at Lee.

"The coat-of-blue has lied," he said simply.

"If it is not as I have told you, O Chief, then I have been tricked."

"Thy brothers line the walls of the Broken Arrow like the leaves of a tree, and their silver shoots-a-heap would slay the Cheyenne."

Hell, he must be talking about a Gatling gun.

"Not so, my father! The coats-of-blue are the brothers of the Cheyenne. It is your chiefs who would force us to raise our rifles against your braves."

American Dog motioned him silent.

"The Cheyenne are not children to be fooled," said the old man. "We are warriors, and brave. This hour I leave with my tribe for the passage to the East, where the coats-of-blue do not look for us. I will lead my people to the lands to the south, where the buffalo run free and the Cheyenne can live as they did in the days before the coming of the white men."

"The coats-of-blue will follow you to the East Passage, American Dog!"

"No! Little Bear will attack them when the sun is high tomorrow, and will keep the coats-of-blue from finding my people until I have lead them safely away. The trap which the hunter has prepared for the hares will catch nothing!"

You're probably right, old boy. If Little Bear can create a diversion with his Dog Soldiers at Broken Arrow, old Matt will think he's got the whole Cheyenne tribe bottled up.

Pearl White Feathers entered the lodge through the skin doorway and confronted American Dog.

"What of these prisoners, mighty chief? Do not their scalps belong to Little Bear, who has captured them? Name the hour of their deaths!"

American Dog scooped up a handfull of dust from the floor of the hutment and let it sift through his fingers.

"When the sun is above the lodges of the Cheyenne," he said, "and the shadows are shortest."

"Noon," thought Lee to himself.

The Indian party went out silently again, and Lee turned to face Irish Lonnigan. The girl was white and tense.

In a few minutes he heard the sound of horses outside, and shouting, and all the noise and clamor that accompanies an Indian tribe as it breaks camp, and he knew that American Dog was leading out his tribe to the East Passage.

"There goes the old chief with his tribe," said Lee, breaking a long silence in the lodge. "Only Little Bear's Dog Soldiers are left in camp."

Irish didn't reply, but looked curiously at a smoke hole in the top of the skin lodge. Lee followed her gaze, and his eyes fell on a patch of sunlight streaming through the opening and falling on the group in the center of the lodge.

Noon.

Little Bear, followed by a group of his painted Crazy Dogs, came into the lodge presently.

"Ho, here comes the great squaw-chief, Little Bear!" exclaimed Lee with forced bravado. "He who lifts the scalps of prisoners. A Crow who lives in the women's lodges!"

Little Bear, rage flashing in his blue eyes, struck Lee with a riding quirt. His face was a mask of anger.

"Crow Woman! Little Bear is not a man! Are his squaws heavy with cubs? Nay! His squaws laugh at him and stray from his lodge like loose mares. The leader of the Crazy Dog society hunts only rabbit and bird. Would he dare to enter the cave of the mountain lion, or stalk the grizzley bear among the rocks? Nay! Would he dare to challenge a great warrior of the blue coats? Nay! Instead, he

would burn the blue-coat, and his fear would make his hand to tremble!"

Little Bear had his hands at Lee's throat, and he spoke hotly in his face.

"Coat-of-blue! Would you dare to meet a chief of the Crazy Dogs?"

He turned angrily and spoke to the Dog Soldiers in Cheyenne, and Lee listened quitely.

He took it. If you can get their attention long enough, the girl can slip away. If he'll only fight, the half-breed devil!

The Indians approached their two prisoners, untied them, and led them outside into the sunlight. There was shouting and talking among the Crazy Dogs, and Lee knew that the word was circulating among the tribesmen: Little Bear was to duel the coat-of-blue. The Cheyenne came leading a group of ponies, and Lee indicated that he would ride his Army mount.

Irish Lonnigan was pulled up on an Indian pony standing beside Lee's horse.

"What are they going to do with us, Lieutenant?" she whispered. "Where are we going?"

"Coat-of-blue!" called Little Bear from his pony. "Before the sun is down this day your scalp will wave in the wind before my lodge!"

Lee smiled faintly and leaned over to whisper to Irish Lonnigan.

"I'm going to duel Little Bear. We'll move back down the trail to fight in the clearing. Now while I hold their attention you slip away from the warriors and ride for Fort Dodge! Don't stop. Don't look back! Ride!"

"What about you, Lieutenant Dupuy?"

"Never you mind about me. Just tell your father everything that's happened here. Tell him that the main body of Cheyenne are going to slip through the East cut tomorrow morning while the Dog Soldiers attack the Regiment at Broken Arrow Canyon. Tell your father about Pearl White Feathers, and ask him to bring charges against Colonel Hanks at Fort Laramie when this campaign is over. The Colonel is guilty of jeopardizing the security of the Regiment."

They were riding by two's down the trail now, Little Bear leading the party, chanting to himself the battle song of the Crazy Dog society, followed by his braves, and Lee riding his big Army mount beside Irish Lonnigan on an Indian pony. When they reached the clearing, Little Bear rode on alone for several hundred yards, across the amphitheater, and the Indians directed their two white prisoners away to one side.

Little Bear had dismounted, removed his feather bonnet, and was bathing himself in dust, with prayers for victory to the Great Spirit. Lee watched him curiously. A Cheyenne brave rode up behind the young officer and thrust at him his sword and pistol belt. Without taking his eyes from Little Bear, now remounting his pony on the other side of the clearing, Lee buckled his weapons at his waist.

If you had a Spencer, you could knock him out of his saddle from here. He has a Spencer, but he won't use it unless he has to. He'll want to hook you up on that damned Cheyenne lance.

Lee turned to face Irish Lonnigan. The girl sat quietly on her pony near the outer edge of the group of Indians.

"Don't forget," said Lee aloud. The Indians watched curiously. It was hot under the afternoon sun.

"Ah-ee-yahaaa!" screamed Little Bear across the clearing.

Lee drew his saber from his side and unbuckled his pistol holster.

Little Bear, stripped down to his breech cloth, came thundering across the clearing, crouched low on his pony, screaming, the carbine bouncing on his back, and the Spanish lance pointed before him. In his right hand he carried the lance, and on his left arm he wore a small painted buffalo shield.

Lee carried his saber straight in his hands like a drill field soldier. His horse pranced around in a circle. He wanted to keep the fighting near the group of watching Indians, if possible, to scatter them.

Little Bear came charging on toward the officer, and Lee, weaving his horse from side to side, rode to meet him. The Cheyenne chief carried his lance on the right side of the pony's neck. When they were but a few feet apart, Lee swung his army horse sharply to the left, and Little Bear could not switch his lance over his mount's head fast enough to catch the charging cavalryman. As he galloped past

the Indian covered his head with the buffalo shield to protect himself from Lee's saber blows.

THE CHEYENNE watching the fight saw their chief riding top speed into their midst, and moved in all directions out of his way. Lee, as he turned, caught sight of Irish Lonnigan moving her horse away from her captors.

"Squaw-man!" yelled Lee. "They have sung of the Cheyenne that they are a nation of warriors! Is this a warrior that I fight? Nay! A woman with heap tongue!"

"Ah-ee-yahaaa!" screamed Little Bear in a rage. He snatched a tomahawk from one of the Dog Soldiers, stuck it in his belt, and rode out into the clearing after Lee.

The young officer, riding his pony slowly, looked back over his shoulder and watched the Indian charging after him. The tip of the Cheyenne lance sparkled and glistened in the sun.

Lee appeared to run away from his pursuer, then turned, and rode head on at Little Bear slashing with his saber to throw his opponent off balance. The Indian slipped to one side of his pony and hung around the neck of the animal. Lee's saber sliced through air above him.

The Indian pony was quicker than Lee's big army horse, and wheeled sharply behind the cavalryman. Little Bear galloped after the officer, tomahawk upraised, and threw the iron weapon at Lee's head. The young officer ducked and the hatchet caught him in the shoulder and bounced off. Lee rocked crazily in his saddle.

The Indians were riding around the edge of the clearing, following the fight, and shouting to themselves in Cheyenne. Irish Lonnigan had ridden still further down the trail from the clearing. She would be out of sight around the bend in another hundred yards.

Little Bear came about again to follow up his attack, but Lee, trying to gain time, galloped his big army mount into the small Indian pony and threw him off balance. Lee hammered away with his saber trying to gain an opening but the Indian half-breed took his lance in both hands and blocked every blow. The two horsemen galloped across the clearing side by side and the blows of the sword against the metal lance sounded out.

He's good, soldier. Stay on your guard. Don't relax. Don't let him hook you on the point of that thing!

At the edge of the clearing the Dog Soldiers had caught the full excitement of the fight, and rode up and down eagerly, shouting, and Irish Lonnigan walked her pony farther and farther from them. Each succeeding encounter of the two combatants put her nearer the bend in the trail. The duel continued for several minutes, neither man gaining an advantage.

Lee crashed his army horse into the Indian pony again, seeking to knock him down. The pony went down on its hind legs, but Little Bear threw up his lance to protect himself, and brought it down with a dull crack on Lee's saber arm. The cavalryman's sword went springing upward with a metallic ring.

Lee was only vaguely aware of Little Bear's cry of victory and the screaming of the Dog soldiers as he dug frantically for his service revolver. Just as his hand reached the butt of his Colt, the heavy lance came around again, catching him in his side.

He didn't even sense the pain. When he opened his eyes again, he was lying in the dust beside his horse, and Little Bear was maneuvering his pony toward him, still screaming.

He felt in the dust for his Colt, but could not locate it. Little Bear was leaning far out of his saddle with his riding quirt to count a coup on Lee—touch a fallen enemy with his whip—and Lee quickly grasped the end of the leather stock and pulled. The half-breed Cheyenne tumbled off his pony on top of the cavalry officer.

A cry of rage and surprise escaped from the Indian as Lee's fist caught him in the throat. The young officer snatched a bone handle knife from Little Bear's breech cloth and raised it upward. Little Bear screamed as the knife fell. The cavalry officer brought the blade down again and again, until his hands were wet and sticky, and the Cheyenne war chief was still.

The Dog Soldiers, momentarily stunned by the unexpected turn of the combat, now raised a cry of revenge of their war chief,

and came thundering across the clearing. Lee lay between them and the trail leading from the clearing. His position was good. The enraged Cheyenne would have to pass him before they could take up the pursuit of their escaping girl prisoner, whom Lee could see only faintly now, in a cloud of dust galloping hard down the rocky path.

Taking the feather-decorated carbine from the body of the fallen Little Bear, Lee cocked the piece, kneeled, and fired between the legs of his horse. The nearest Dog Soldier, low in his saddle and coming fast, jack-knifed from his pony when the 50 cal. slug hammered into him. Lee fired again. A second Cheyenne grabbed his stomach and hung in the air as his pony galloped out from under him.

The rest of the Cheyenne braves reined up and began to fan out on the lone cavalry officer. A musket ball kicked up the dust at his feet. He lifted the Spencer again and calmly fired. Another Dog Soldier went down.

Lee picked up the Crazy Dog lance from the ground and mounted his horse. A brave attempt to cut him off from the trail fell under a swinging blow of the big shaft, and Lee gained the rocky path in a fast gallop.

If he could make the level country he would beat them. The little Indian ponies would be no match for the fast army mount.

VIII

DAWN CAME over the East Passage in a blaze of yellow, revealing to Lee's observant eyes the forms of blue-clad soldiers huddled in the purple shadows on either side of the canyon. Crouched behind a huge boulder, the young cavalry officer pulled his saddle blanket closer around him for protection against the early morning cold. His Spencer carbine rested on the rock in front of him. He waited patiently, listening, occasionally watching the other men above and below him.

They had been there since midnight.

He remembered the words of Colonel Hanks when he had ridden into Fort Dodge the afternoon before.

"I warn you, Lieutenant," the Colonel had said, "that the charges you bring against me are serious, and should you press them at Fort Laramie, I'll bring counter-charges against you for slander. I will not tolerate having my career ruined after nineteen years of service."

"I tell you she was there, sir, in the camp of American Dog. She told him your exact plans, and you are the only person from whom she could have obtained them. Pearl knew everything, sir. She got to American Dog even before I did."

Lee, barefooted, his blue uniform cut to ribbons, had sat on a wooden bench in the Orderly Room of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment the day before while the surgeon had dressed his wounds. It had been late in the afternoon and Colonel Hanks had strode up and down over the plank floor, head forward, his hands locked behind him. From time to time he had stopped to scrutinize the military map on the wall.

"It would be extremely unfortunate, Lieutenant," the Colonel had continued, "to have a record so brilliant as yours marred by ugly court martial proceedings. You are young yet, with years of service left before you. Don't risk losing all that by false accusations. I know this Indian girl well. Pearl is loyal, gentle, and affectionate, Mister Dupuy. What you say about her is impossible to believe. I . . . ," here the colonel had stumbled and groped for words, ". . . even intend to marry her, mister, after a respectable period of time has elapsed after the death of my wife. I simply will not have her accused of treachery."

"Miss Lonnigan will bear out my charges if you will question her, sir," Lee had insisted wearily.

"I have told you, mister, that Captain Lonnigan's daughter is in a state of complete collapse at the infirmary. She was found not far from Dodge by the Regimental scouts just before you rode in."

The Colonel had been as rigid as a statue in his firmness.

"She will suport my changes when she has sufficiently recovered," Lee had said.

"Perhaps, Lieutenant; perhaps. But in the meanwhile I must determine whether old American Dog released Miss Lonnigan of his own free will, in accordance with our plans, and will lead his tribe into our ambush at Broken Arrow canyon to-

morrow morning, or whether, as you insist, she escaped with your help, and the Cheyenne plan to slip out of the Territory by the East Passage.

"American Dog will be out of the cut by dawn tomorrow."

"I would be inclined to believe your story in every detail, Lieutenant, but for your preposterous accusations against Pearl White Feathers. What do you hope to gain? Revenge? Do you hate all the Cheyenne Indians for the unfortunate death of your friend, Lt. Donahue, yesterday? Do you want to make a poor innocent Indian girl responsible for something she knows nothing about?"

Lee had thrown up his hands in a gesture of hopeless dispair. "Where is Pearl now, Colonel? Bring her in here to question her yourself."

"Unfortunately, Mister," Hanks had snapped, "Pearl left before you did yesterday to visit the Indian school at Ft. Laramie. I expect her back tomorrow."

"And in the morning American Dog will lead his people through the East Passage to Colorado to join the southern Cheyenne on the war trail, while the Crazy Dogs engage the Regiment at Broken Arrow with a little holding attack. You can't believe that Indian bitch could torture a prisoner because she smiles so sweetly on you!"

"Watch your tongue, Lieutenant! I'll have you thrown in the guardhouse, sir!" Colonel Hanks had shouted to him.

Lee remembered pulling off his tunic and turning his back angrily to the Colonel.

"Do you see that, sir?" he had shouted hotly. "That's what your affectionate Pearl White Feathers did. That's what a sharpened cane reed in the hands of a Cheyenne squaw can do!"

Hanks' face had drained white.

"No doubt you were tortured, Lieutenant. By whom, I don't know."

"There's only one way I can convince you, sir. You know that anyone who took the lance away from the Crazy Dog society would have to kill Little Bear first."

"And you contend that you did, in a duel witnessed by the Dog Soldiers themselves, permitted Miss Lonnigan to escape from under the very noses of the Cheyenne, and got away yourself," the Colonel had smiled. "A remarkable feat, Mister. Truly remarkable."

Angrily, Lee had brushed past the surgeon, out of the Orderly Room, and walked to his horse. In a minute he had returned with the eight-foot shaft, and stuck it in the floor at the Colonel's feet.

The Colonel had examined the Crazy Dog lance curiously; then, turning to his Striker, Juarez, he had said, "Ride to Broken Arrow Canyon and instruct the Regiment to move immediately to the East Passage. I'll assume command there at dawn!"

Lee had smiled in relief.

"Bugler! Bugler!" Colonel Hanks had shouted from the doorway of the Orderly Room. "Sound Boots and Saddles. Turn out the whole station force . . . cooks, bakers, the Regimental band, even the prisoners from the guard house. I want every trooper on this post under arms, full marching order and a hundred rounds of ammunition in twenty minutes."

In a few minutes the whole garrison had been responding with shouts to the clear notes of the bugle.

Putting on a new pair of boots, Lee had hobbled painfully to the window. The garrison had been alive with activity. An old doctor waddled out of the infirmary buckling a saber about his plump middle, as if he wasn't sure it was meant to be there. At the guard house, a dozen or so prisoners streamed out into the afternoon sun, blinking their eyes, and wondering at the confusion. Cooke had been one of them. A guard approached with an arm load of Spencer carbines and began issuing them. Still wearing his apron, white with flour, a cook from the mess hall had emerged from the stables across the field pulling behind him a stubborn army horse.

Lee remembered the cold voice of the Colonel speaking.

"If you're able to ride, Lieutenant, you may resume command of your platoon. The Regiment may not be able to join us at the East Passage tomorrow before American Dog starts to move his people through. We'll need every man we can get. I'm even taking the prisoners from the guardhouse. I believe one of them is from your platoon. Keep an eye on him."

"Yes, sir. Private Cooke."

"When we return I'll prepare charges against myself with you as the principal complainant," said Hanks coldly, not looking up from his desk.

Lee had paused uncertainly. It had been an unpleasant situation.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't know . . ."

"No apologies necessary," Colonel Hanks had replied dully.

"No apologies necessary," thought Lee to himself again.

He remembered clearly the scene with the Colonel. Now the Commanding Officer sat on a rock below him talking to a Major. Lee had watched him during the night, doing his duty as he saw it, placing his men, waiting for dawn and for the appearance of American Dog's band.

"Which way will the Indians come, Lieutenant?"

Lee turned around. Cooke was squatting behind him, his Spencer carbine across his knees.

Lee pointed silently up the north end of the canyon.

You yellow skunk. If you had done your job right, Donahue would be alive today; alive, and waiting for his discharge. I hope you get yours today.

"Has the Regiment been sighted yet, sir?"

Lee shook his head.

"Look, Lieutenant, I know how you feel about that Lieutenant Donahue that got killed the other day. I didn't mean it to happen. I couldn't help myself. I was afraid, sir. Those Crazy Dogs were all around me. But I didn't meant the troopers to get killed. None of them. It doesn't do any good to say I'm sorry, but I'll make it up to the Regiment. Somehow."

"Get back to your position, trooper," said Lee.

Suddenly from the far end of the canyon two shots from a Spencer carbine split the cool morning air. The echo reverberated from the walls of the canyon.

"There they are, Lieutenant!" called Sanchez to Lee. "Around the bend up there. The whole tribe!"

The troopers farthest up the canyon oepned fire with sharp, scattered shots. A few Indians dashed around the bend and discharged their muskets.

"Hold your fire," shouted Colonel Hanks standing up in full view. "I want to talk to American Dog."

He was picking his way carefully down the edge of the canyon. Behind him the troopers waited tensely. Once on the floor of the canyon, the Colonel paused, cupped his hands to his mouth, and called up.

"Lt. Dupuy! Will you come with me, please. American Dog knows you, and it may be possible to reason with him."

Lee stood up and began climbing down. Sergeant Sanchez watched him without expression, not exposing himself, offering with his eyes a kind of consoling sympathy.

When he reached the Colonel, Lee fell in silently on his left side and began walking boldly up the canyon. He could feel the eyes of the troopers in the rocks boring down on him.

"We may be able to bluff American-Dog," said the Colonel by way of explanation. "The Regiment should be here in another half-hour, if we can only hold this pass."

LEE COULD make out the forms of the Indians flattened agai..st the rocks up the canyon from them. A single musket shot exploded from the Indians' positions and smacked into the wall of the canyon above the heads of the two soldiers.

"American Dog!" shouted Lee. "Hold your fire. I have with me the chief of the coats-of-blue. He would hold a pow-wow with you!"

There was silence from the Cheyenne lines. Then, from far down the canyon, a single horseman came riding slowly.

The Colonel squinted into the morning sun.

"Is that American Dog?" he asked.

Lee watched carefully. The figure was naked from the waist up, and carried a rifle across the saddle blanket.

"Too young for the chief," said Lee, wishing now he had brought his own Spencer. "Must be one of the young bucks."

The officers recognized the Indian horseman about the same time. It was Pearl White Feathers, dressed in the tribal regalia, and painted for battle.

The Colonel looked bewildered, then

regained his composure.

"I'll handle this," he said curtly. "Stay here."

Lee watched the old officer walking up the canyon to meet the girl. He saw the Colonel raise his hand, and the girl stop. They were too far away for Lee to hear their conversation. Then, easily, unhurriedly, the Indian girl swung her musket around on the old officer and very deliberately pulled the trigger. The shot rang out among the canyon rocks. Hanks turned toward his troopers with an expression of disbelief, as if betrayed, then fell face-down on the floor of the canyon.

Lee watched frozen in his tracks.

Pearl turned her pony about and began walking him slowly back toward the Indian positions. Raising himself on his elbow, Hanks pulled out his big service Colt from his holster and fired at the girl's back. The explosion echoed up the waiting canyon, and Pearl hung onto the pony for a moment, then toppled into the dust.

As the frightened pony galloped back down the canyon, Lee sprinted toward his commanding officer. Hanks raised himself again and shouted, "Get back, damnit! That's an order. The Cheyenne will shoot you down if you come out here. Get back, Mister, and hold that pass until the Regiment can get here!"

Lee stopped. The floor and walls of the canyon around him were alive with musket balls ricocheting into the dust. The Cheyenne sharpshooters were trying to bring him down. He turned and bolted for safety of the wall again just as another fusillade of shots broke from the Indian position.

A few minutes later he was standing beside Sergeant Sanchez in the rocks where the troopers were entrenched. They could see the Colonel lying in full view of the Indians up the canyon.

"They're mounting up for a charge, sir," said Sanchez. "If we don't get Colonel Hanks out of there right away, they'll run over him."

"He ordered me back," said Lee. "He said to hold this pass until the Regiment gets here."

As he turned Lee caught sight of a blue-uniformed trooper, his field kerchief a bright yellow around his neck, sliding down the face of the canyon below them.

"Who is that fool?" demanded Lee. "Does he want to get run down by American Dog?"

"Cooke," replied Sanchez blandly.

"Where does he think he's going?"

They watched the lone cavalryman picking his way from rock to rock, moving closer to Colonel Hanks. At the opposite end of the canyon, American Dog could be seen directing his horsemen up on a solid line, preparing for a charge against the little body of troopers. Several of the braves spotted the lone blue-clad soldier creeping along and their musket balls spattered the stones about him, covering him in flint chips.

Now a general war cry went up from the Cheyenne tribe and the Indians began their thundering charge. Cooke sprang from the cover of the rocks and ran hard toward the Colonel while the ground spurted around him under musket fire. The Cheyenne band came riding on, screaming, shooting, and waving their lances, and the canyon was hidden in the great cloud of dust raised by the feet of their ponies. Cooke stumbled, got up, ran on, and reached the Colonel's side. Picking up the officer in his arms, the cavalryman turned and started back toward the safety of the rocks.

"Hold your fire!" shouted Lee. "You may hit our own people!"

But the Cheyenne horsemen drew closer, and Lee saw that they were about to trample the two struggling figures.

"Shoot high in volleys," cried the young officer desperately. "Fire!"

A ragged echo rattled from the walls of the canyon and dug into the charging Indians. But it was not strong enough. The wave of Cheyenne rolled over the two cavalrymen on the floor of the canyon, and Cooke and the Colonel disappeared beneath the dust of the ponies' feet.

IX

"FIRE!" shouted Lee a second time. The Spencers barked again, and Cheyenne braves tumbled from their horses. Around him other officers were shouting, and the cavalrymen firing, and the Indians fired back up into the rocks at the hidden blue-coats. The canyon was a din of exploding carbines, muskets, gun

powder smoke, screaming, and dust. American Dog could be seen walking his pony calmly among his braves, pulling the wounded Cheyenne back on their horses, and pointing out the cavalrymen to his Indian shrapshooters.

"Fire!" screamed Lee, waving his sword. "Fire! We're stopping them! Fire!"

Some of the braves had slipped past the soldiers and were riding for safety down the other end of the canyon. The Cheyenne attempted to keep their squaws and old people sheltered behind them. There was a lot of screaming from the Indians. The troopers did their work grimly and silently, shooting, loading, firing into the struggling Cheyenne mass.

At last the resistance broke, and American Dog wheeled and led his people back down the canyon from where they had come, leaving ground littered with his dead and wounded.

A young boy with a shattered leg picked himself up from among the bodies covering the floor of the canyon and limped after the tribe. The troopers let him go.

In the middle of the canyon a squaw sat wailing. She had been shot through the neck.

An old warrior, bleeding from chest wounds, attempted to raise himself from the ground to continue his fight, but his strength gave away and he fell down again silently to die.

"Mister Dupuy!" yelled an officer on the other side of the canyon. "How many wounded have you?"

Lee's eyes searched the rocks around him. His troopers watched him carefully.

"None," he shouted back in reply.

"Then will you send some of your troopers over on this side of the wall. The firing is weak over here."

"Sergeant Sanchez!"

The platoon sergeant was already designating which men should go when Lee called. Half a dozen blue-coats were scrambling down the rocky ledge and running single-file across the floor of the canyon.

Lee looked over the bodies below him. Beyond, where the Indians lay, were two blue-uniformed bundles fairly kicked to pieces by the feet of the Indian ponies. They lay close together.

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Cooke and the Colonel. Funny they should end up like that. Old Matt probably hated his guts, and Cookie died trying to save him. He wasn't yellow. He looked pretty good out there a while ago. Pretty good. He was something of a skunk, but he made up for it to the Regiment. He ought to be recommended for a decoration.

Lee heard a shuffling noise on the rocks behind him and turned to face Sanchez.

"You hear anything, Lieutenant?" asked the platoon sergeant.

Lee lestened. "No. What?"

Sanchez cocked his head. "Drums, maybe?"

Lee stiffened.

Death Drums. They're coming through this time or die in the attempt.

The young officer listened intently for several moments and at last detected the faint pounding of a muffled drum, and the moans of the Cheyenne preparing to make their final charge.

Lee stood up and shouted across the canyon.

"The Cheyenne are coming through this time. They're beating the Death Drums. Get ready!"

The noise was louder now as the tribe moved closer, marching in parade fashion. They were singing tribal songs and chanting among themselves. Weaving as if they were drugged, the first Indians appeared around the bend in the canyon. Some of the foot warriors were dancing. The whole spectacle was like a fantastic nightmare that left the waiting troopers with a cold feeling at the base of their skulls.

You haven't seen anything like this since Powder River. Those Cheyenne have gone crazy. They'll come through this time. You can't hold them back. Too bad the Regiment didn't get here.

Lee gripped the stock of his carbine and cocked back the hammer. The Cheyenne were perfectly quiet now.

The sun was up high in the morning and the purple shadows which had covered the canyon earlier that morning were now gone. Where the air had been cool, it was hot and damp, and the atmosphere was weighted with the feeling of impending action. The only sounds which arose from East Canyon were the groanings of the Indians who had been wounded in the first charge.

The Death Drums were silenced.

Suddenly, so suddenly that even the watching cavalrymen were startled, a great cry went up from the Indian band, and they began moving their horses forward at a trot, picking up speed as they came. A few troopers opened fire with deadly, persistent shots, but the Indians came on.

Now they approached the positions of the cavalrymen and their voices lifted in a cry of defiance which sounded down the length of the canyon. The shooting started again in earnest—the even, precise volleys of the soldier's carbines against the scattered replies of the Indian muskets. Lee loaded and fired. Cheyenne braves rolled from their ponies. In the blinding dust he saw an Indian brave ride up to a cavalryman, pull him from behind a rock, and brain him with a war club. Lee fired at the painted brave, but lost him in the confusion. Indians fell from their mounts and were trampled by those thundering behind them. The Cheyenne were going through.

What's the use? You can't stop them. A couple of thousand red sticks down there against a handfull of troopers. You're lucky they don't take time out to kill every calvalryman around here.

The mounted Indians were past the soldiers now, followed by those on foot—the squaws and the old. The volleys of the carbines took great chunks out of the Indian ranks which were quickly refilled by other Cheyenne pressing in from the rear. The slaughter was simply immense. When the women and children went past, screaming, shooting like their men, the firing from the Spencer carbines along the walls of the canyon automatically died out. The great parade of screaming Indians continued past for several minutes, and toward the end, as the cavalrymen realized the futility of the killing, there was no shooting at all from their Spencer carbines.

Let them come on. You can't stop them. Come on! Come on!

The screaming tribesmen were down the canyon beyond the cavalrymen's positions. It was quiet again. The Regiment had not arrived, and the Cheyenne tribe was escaping to the south to join their brothers

on the war path against the Colorado settlers. The station force had failed to stop them.

Lee stood up wearily, stretched himself, and looked down into the canyon. It was littered with the bodies of dead and dying Cheyenne.

"Sergeant Sanchez! Everyone all right?"

The platoon sergeant came up cautiously from below Lee's position and looked around.

"I saw one man get it, sir. I don't know about the rest."

"Mister Dupuy!" came a shout again from across the canyon. It was the same voice, the Major. "Better keep your men under cover until the Regiment does get here. Those Cheyenne might decide to come back and clean out the rest of us!"

Lee waved his hand in acknowledgement. Below him Sanchez was moving among the troopers checking on injuries. The sun had become unbearibly hot and Lee felt a vague resentment against the Regiment for not arriving in time. He suffered the nausea of the soldier defeated in battle—the feeling of a child who has misplaced a toy, or a husband who discovers an unfaithful wife. He was suddenly sick of the whole unpleasantness.

It all happened again very quickly.

At the other end of the canyon the Indian muskets began firing anew; the Major across the canylon began shouting, and the troopers were nervously loading their carbines.

"Lt. Dupuy, they're coming back to attack!" shouted Sanchez from the floor of the canyon. He was scrambling back up into the rocks.

Like an ocean wave dashing itself to bits on the rocks of a cliff the band of American Dog came swarming back down the canyon. The horsemen had overrun those on foot and were leading the way. Screaming and shouting, the Indians came on. Lee saw one Cheyenne warrior throw down his musket and begin climbing up the rock wall. There was no firing, only the yelling.

Above the confusion came the sound of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment's bugler blowing 'charge.'

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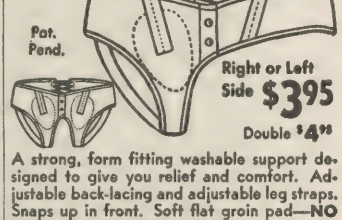

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come in from the opposite end of the canyon and bottled them up. All the Indians want now is a way to escape!

"Hold your fire!" shouted Lee. "Here comes the Regiment!"

The soldiers heard the bugle themselves and were shouting. Their voices were drowned out, however, by the noise of the defeated Cheyenne tribesmen streaming back past them. There was no shooting. The East Canyon fairly thundered with the noise of the savages and horses.

Now the Regiment came into view, riding eight abreast, sabers drawn and flashing in the morning sunlight, wave after wave. All the fight was gone now from the Indians. They allowed themselves to be driven before the wall of cavalrymen like whipped dogs. Lee saw a trooper ride up to a fat squaw who was attempting to hide behind a rock, spank her with the flat of his blade, and drive her back into the retreating herd. The power of American Dog was broken in the Wyoming Territory once and for all times.

Standing on a rock, Lee waved to Captain Lonnigan as his troop galloped past, and the Irishman reined up. Braggel rode over to where the two officers stood.

"We were afraid you wouldn't make it!" laughed Lee. "American Dog came within an inch of escaping out of the territory."

"The Regiment was held up by the Crazy Dogs," replied Lonnigan.

"Lee, you should have been there!" said Braggel eagerly. "The Dog Soldiers rode right into our Gatling gun. We knocked them over like nine-pins, man. They high-tailed back toward the reservation." The boy was excited. At last he had seen battle.

"I received word that you brought back Irish," said Lonnigan. "I want to thank you."

"We heard you killed Little Bear, too, the sneaky half-breed! Is that right? He wasn't with his Crazy Dogs. I'd like to get a crack at him!" This was young Braggel again.

"Yes, he's dead," replied Lee. "Since yesterday. The Colonel was killed this morning. Cooke attempted to rescue him, and they were both trampled by the horses."

"Cooke?" questioned Lonnigan. "Wasn't that the trooper in your platoon the Colonel was going to court martial for cowardice?"

Lee nodded slowly.

The Regiment was engaged in rounding up all the Cheyenne stragglers now. Troopers rode up and down the canyon bringing in prisoners. It had been a complete victory for the 3rd Cavalry. A dust cloud in the distance marked the progress of the Cheyenne band returning to their reservation.

"Hey, Lieutenant," called Sanchez. "They're bringing in old American Dog as a prisoner. He's hurt and he wants to see you."

Lee looked up curiously and saw a body of horsemen approaching slowly down the canyon. American Dog, supported on each side by one of his young braves, was riding in. A platoon of cavalry surrounded him.

"He . . . he looks awfully old, doesn't he?" said Braggel uncertainly, as if it had just occurred to him that war is not the glamorous business he had thought.

Lee walked across the canyon to meet the prisoners. American Dog lifted his hand feebly. He had been shot in the stomach and clamped a stick in his mouth to keep his teeth from chattering. The braves helped to hold him, and removed the stick so he could speak. Behind him, the cavalry troopers waited uneasily, with expressions of guilt written on their faces.

"The Crazy Dogs chant that the coat-of-blue has slain Little Bear, the war chief of the Cheyenne. His women weep in his lodge, but they kiss the hand of the coat-of-blue for keeping the honor of their chief. The coat-of-blue has let the fallen Little Bear keep his scalp for the life in the Happy Hunting Grounds."

Lee cleared his throat nervously, and the pain of the old man's wound caused him to stop talking for a moment.

"The Crazy Dogs chant that the coat-of-blue has taken in battle the Great Lance, which has been among the Cheyenne for many seasons, and kept them a strong and great nation. Now the Great Lance is gone from the Crazy Dog society, and the Cheyenne are beaten. We go now back to the lands which the coats-of-blue have given to us.

"Hear one, my brothers. From this day forward, in the lands of my people, I no more make war on the white man."

With that, American Dog extended his musket to Lee, butt first, then turned with his captors to begin the ride back to the reservation.

Lee watched them riding slowly back down the canyon.

"I guess that ends the Indian wars," observed Braggel.

"The Wyoming territory will be quiet as a church yard now," said Sanchez. He had been standing quietly behind Lee during the whole interview.

Captain Lonnigan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "And open for settlers," he added.

"Real civilized," smiled Braggel happily. "A man wouldn't be afraid to live out here with his bride."

Lee didn't reply. He was thinking of how the Crazy Dog Lance would look mounted on the wall in his quarters.

"Give you five gold dollars for it, Lieutenant," grinned Sanchez, reading his thoughts.

Lee smiled. "Not for sale, Sergeant. Not for a million."

"It'll be too quiet around here with the Crazy Dogs tamed down," said Sanchez. "Makes a fighting man think about transferring to the Infantry down in Texas. They're fighting Comanches down there."

Lee laughted out loud. "Come off of it, Sergeant! You know you wouldn't leave the 3rd Cavalry! You love your horses too much!"

The platoon sergeant slung his carbine over his shoulder and rubbed his seat tenderly.

"I may be a Cavalryman at heart," he grinned, "but I've got the behind of a nursemaid, sir!"

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